THE MODERN DRAMA SERIES
EDITED BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

EDITH ELLIS • MARY JANE'S PA

MARY JANE'S PA

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS BY

EDITH ELLIS

BOSTON
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1920

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INTRODUCTION

SOME seek all their lives to become writers; others have the task of writing thrust upon them. Of the latter class is the author of " Mary Jane's Pa," who in her professional capacities, as actress, producer, and playwright, prefers to be known by her maiden name of Edith Ellis.

Of her it may be said with almost literal truth that she " began her life " on the stage, and with the stage she has been connected in one way or another throughout her career. Her father, Edward C. Ellis, is a playwright and actor. Her mother, Ruth McCarty Ellis, was an actress. Her brother is Edward Ellis, author of " Any Night " and an actor of high standing.

She herself played her first part at six, having been born, however, not on the stage, but at Coldwater, Branch County, Michigan, which region was colonized and built up by her ancestors. At ten she was a star, and before she was twelve, two plays had been written especially for her. Since those days of infantile triumphs she has probably had a more varied theatrical experience than any other woman connected with the American stage to-day. She has, as far as I can make out, at one time or another, performed every duty required for a dramatic production, from painting the scenery to writing the play. During several periods she has been at the head of her own stock companies,

travelling or stationary, and more than once she has written the play, produced it, directed the rehearsals, and played the star part herself. And perhaps this is one of the main reasons why she is so violently opposed to the combination of such conflicting parts as those of actor, director, and manager.

Her first ventures as a dramatist were accidental or forced upon her. The first thing she ever did in this line was a volume of dialogues from Dickens prepared for amateur performances. It met with great success, but although she was only seventeen at the time, she was not tempted into thinking herself a writer. When, more than ten years later, she took to the pen again, it was to meet an acute situation: her husband's company was threatened with ruin by a play that had proved a dismal failure. To save the day she wrote "A Batch of Blunders," a musical comedy in three acts, and rehearsed it in three weeks, while the company went on filling its dates with the original bill. The old play closed one night and the new one opened the next — and the day was saved.

The first work that brought her conspicuously before the public as a playwright was her three-act farce, "Mrs. B. O'Shaughnessy (Wash Lady)," in which George W. Munroe starred three seasons. In 1904 she produced a four-act domestic drama, "The Point of View," representing for the first time a push from within rather than a pull from without. She had the temerity to produce it at the Berkeley Lyceum, New York, under her own management and with herself in the principal female part. In those days the reign of the "syndicate" was still unchallenged, and as the Berkeley Lyceum was not controlled by any member

of that group, the play was doomed from the first. Since then the play in question has been completely rewritten under the name of "Man and his Mate."

"Mary Jane's Pa" was begun in 1905 and finished a year later. In 1908 it was produced for the first time by Henry W. Savage at the Garden Theatre, New York, with Henry E. Dixey as *Hiram Perkins*. Later Max Figman starred two seasons in the same part. From the first this play was a success, and every year it is being revived by stock companies in different parts of the country.

There are several reasons for this popularity. One is the strikingly American atmosphere pervading the work. Very few plays equal its faithful portrayal of life in a small American community. Another explanation of its powerful appeal lies in the character of *Hiram Perkins* — a character that is thoroughly characteristic of the author's way of looking at life and at human beings. She has humor of the most exquisite kind. She has that strength of soul, that faith in life, which enables her to regard human foibles and faults with a smile. *Hiram* is a scamp in many ways, but he is one of the most lovable scamps created by means of the English tongue since the days of the immortal *Falstaff*. Without carrying the comparison too far, one might well speak of him as an American *Peer Gynt*. That he "reforms" in the end is not expressive of the author's desire of a happy ending, but of her wish to emphasize the fact that, when opposed qualities enter into a character, it depends largely on external circumstances whether the good or the bad ones shall be brought to the front. The thesis of the play might be sought in her conviction that the quali-

ties which made a scamp of *Hiram* at Medairyville, Indiana, might in all likelihood have made him a highly successful citizen, husband and father in New York City.

Among Edith Ellis' manifold activities in the dramatic field during recent years may be mentioned a dramatization of Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" and an adaptation of Ferencz Herczegh's "Seven Sisters"; the production of a musical comedy, "The Charity Game," and the libretto of an operetta, "The Love Wager," in which Fritzi Scheff has been starring; the dramatization of E. P. Roe's "He Fell in Love with his Wife" and of Henry Russell Miller's "The Man Higher Up"; the writing of a four-act Canadian drama, "Vespers," a three-act American sociological play, "Fields of Flax," and a three-act light opera, "The Amethyst Ring."

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PLAYS BY EDITH ELLIS

A Batch of Blunders, 1897;
Mrs. B. O'Shaughnessy (Wash Lady), 1900;
Because I Love You, 1903;
The Point of View, 1904;
The Wrong Man, 1905;
Contrary Mary, 1905;
Ben of Broken Bow, 1905;
Mary Jane's Pa, 1906;
He Fell in Love with his Wife, 1910;
The Man Higher Up, 1912.

THE FIRST ACT

PERSONS

Portia Perkins

Lucille Perkins

Mary Jane Perkins

Ivy Wilcox

Miss Faxon

Barrett Sheridan

Star Skinner

Joel Skinner

Claud Whitcomb

Linc Watkins

Rome Preston

Hiram Perkins

MARY JANE'S PA

THE FIRST ACT

It is a waning September afternoon, so early in the present century that the little town of Gosport, Indiana, where the scene is laid, is still outside those phases of social evolution which are now named The Labor Question, Feminism, Trial Marriage, Linotyping, Direct Primaries, The Crematorium, The Montessori Method, and The House Beautiful.

The room shown is both dining and living room. The door at the back stands open, but is covered by a screen door and leads onto a side porch. To the right, at the rear, is a bay window commanding a neighborly view of the house next door and, more obliquely, of the street. A door in the right wall leads into the parlor, which, as is customary in rural America, is dedicated to formal occasions. An open staircase, broken by a turn and landing, occupies the left upper portion of the room. At the top of the stair is a door leading to a passage, off which the bedrooms are situated. In the left wall, below the staircase, is a door leading to the kitchen and, beyond it, to the back yard.

Against the lower right wall is a sideboard and, a few feet in front of it, a dining-table of the highly varnished "golden oak" variety; the accompanying six chairs of the "set" are disposed about the room. The other furnishings are a tufted velveteen-covered

couch and cushions; a reading-table in the window, on which is the traditional globular lamp with decorated shade; a sewing machine and workbasket, on which lies tossed an unfinished shirt waist. Two or three rocking-chairs are about the upper and left portion of the room. To the left of the outer door is an oak hat-stand holding a waterproof, a couple of umbrellas, a sunbonnet, and a child's jacket. At the foot of the stair is a small stand on which are three small bedroom lamps and a dish of matches. At the windows are shades and Nottingham lace curtains; a few potted plants stand on the sills. On the floor is a tapestry Brussels rug of a pattern and color not in the best taste. The walls are papered semi-inconspicuously and are relieved by a few colored photogravures, framed gayly in gilt, while three or four black oval frames contain the likenesses of men in Civil War uniforms and women in hoop skirts and flowing sleeves. A shelf on the wall of the jog is draped in gay flowered silk, and on it is a clock, a few glass and china ornaments, small picture frames, etc.; below it is a light oak combination bookcase and writing-desk. A neat disorder prevails, showing that the room is constantly lived in. Books, magazines, writing material, and sewing indicate the activities and pleasures of the occupants.

The whole atmosphere reflects homely comfort, an absence of luxury, and a pastoral innocence of the William Morris influence.

At the dining-table and facing the kitchen door Lucille Perkins sits working over her lessons, her books and writing material scattered before her. She is sixteen, slender, graceful, and simply gowned in a light cotton dress. Her face is delicate and shows imagina-

tion, self-will, a divine discontent fostered by dreams of the great world beyond her ken. A certain intellectual quickness, and a pride in it, gives her a poise and dignity that is very rare in one of her years and circumstances.

VOICE (*from kitchen*)
Whoo-ee! Is anybody at home?

LUCILLE (*looking up*)
Is that you, Ivy?

IVY (*cautiously looking in before entering. She is the self-assured, ignorant, blatant, belle of the very small town, about eighteen years of age and pretty in a flashy way. She has on a faded loose Mother Hubbard wrapper and old slippers. Her front hair is in curl papers and the rest is in a frowzy pigtail down her back. She appears to be husbanding her charms that later will be displayed in complete effulgence when her hair is "done" and she is "dressed up"*) Yeh-ah, it 's me. Ain't anybody here, is they?

LUCILLE
No, I 'm alone.

IVY
Thank goodness! I just run over the back way. I 'm a perfect show. (*She comes into the centre of the room, reassured that there are no males present and her reputation as a "looker" is still safe*)

LUCILLE (*exhibiting a mild neighborly interest*)
What have you got your hair done up for? Where are you going?

IVY
Over to Cloverdale.

LUCILLE

What is it?

IVY (*with conscious pride*)

G. A. R. Sociable. I 'm goin' to recite.

LUCILLE

Oh! (*suppressing a little amused smile*)

IVY

Yeh-ah. Em-hm. I came over to see if you had any perfumery. I had an elegant bottle of Jockey Club, and I knocked it off the what-not accidental and spilled the whole of it.

LUCILLE (*rising*)

I have some violet, I think. (*Goes up to clock shelf and gets it*)

IVY

Violet? That always seems kind of weak to me. (*She pulls out the stopper, turns some of the extract on her wrapper, and sniffs it*) Seems like a waste of money to buy it; but of course it smells better than nothin'. (*Hears noise in street and runs up to window, cautiously draws curtains aside and peeks out; her face lights up*) There 's Star Skinner ridin' by in his rig. He 's most breakin' his neck to look in here. (*Jumps back from window*) My land, I would n't let Star Skinner see me like this fer the world. (*Takes another peek*) Now he 's slowed his horse up to a walk (*with a trace of malicious envy*) Tryin' to ketch sight of *you*, I suppose. . . . There he goes. . . . (*Looks after him a moment, then comes down to the table and watches Lucille writing*) Doin' your lessons?

LUCILLE

Yes.

IVY

What?

LUCILLE

Algebra, Latin, and English.

IVY

My goodness, I don't see how you ever remember all that mixed-up mess. I never was cut out fer high school . . . but then, I guess my devotin' myself to poetry recitations the way I do is jest as educative.

LUCILLE (*dryly*)

Very likely.

[*A long low whistle is heard from the front of the house. Lucille looks up, her face brightens. Ivy runs to the window.*

IVY

Why, there 's that elegant actor fellow that played here Carnival Week. (*Jumps back with a squeal and begins running in a panic-stricken way about the room*) Oh, he 's comin' in here. . . . Oh, where 'll I go? . . . Oh, Lucille, don't let him see me. . . . Oh! . . . (*Dashes into the parlor at the right and pulls the door shut after her*)

LUCILLE

Barrett Sheridan coming here?

[*She goes quickly to mirror in sideboard, runs her hands over her hair to smooth it, straightens her belt, and gives a little pull at her collar. Barrett Sheridan appears at the screen door and knocks. He is a well-set-up, good-looking chap of twenty-three or four. There is something of the romantic in his appearance, and in his speech and bearing an over-emphasis that is characteristic of the lesser people of the stage. Underneath this, however, is a*

sincere and generous nature, and shining through all the breeding and clean ideals of the best type of educated Middle West American. He is dressed fashionably for travelling.

LUCILLE (*making an effort to appear nonchalant*)
Why, Mr. Sheridan, what a surprise!

SHERIDAN
Yes, I knew it would be.

LUCILLE
I 'd like to ask you in, but . . .

SHERIDAN
I know . . . your mother . . .

LUCILLE
Oh, she is n't here now.

SHERIDAN
Is n't she? (*He opens the screen door and steps inside; their eyes rest on each other's faces eagerly*) And if she were here, she would n't ask me in . . . (*A little embarrassed pause*) I had to pass through Gosport to-day, and I stopped over just to get a look at you. Why have n't you answered my letters?

LUCILLE
Mother would n't let me.

SHERIDAN
Oh. . . . She certainly has no use for an actor.

LUCILLE
I 'm so sorry.

SHERIDAN
I wanted to tell you that I 've arranged to play here another week, beginning the twenty-seventh.

LUCILLE
Oh, splendid!

SHERIDAN

Are you glad, dear?

LUCILLE (*gasping*)

Oh!

SHERIDAN

I mean, are you glad . . . er . . . a . . . Miss Lucille?

LUCILLE

Of course I am. Oh, I do love to see you act. I 'm sure you must be the greatest actor in the world.

SHERIDAN (*feeling that there is some justice in the praise, but bearing it modestly*) Oh, not *the* greatest, perhaps.

LUCILLE

Well, almost, anyway.

SHERIDAN (*coming down to earth*)

I 've got to be on my way. I just wanted to be sure you had n't forgotten me . . . and do try and get your mother to like me a little.

LUCILLE

I have tried.

SHERIDAN

Have you?

LUCILLE (*tracing a pattern in the carpet with her toe*)

Yes.

SHERIDAN

Well, good-bye, Lucille. . . . (*Getting her hand in his*) You 'll let me call you Lucille, won't you?

LUCILLE

Why . . . a . . . yes . . . that 's my name.

SHERIDAN

Then good-bye until . . . (*He starts for the door*)

LUCILLE

Oh, say . . . . er . . . Mr. Sheridan . . .

SHERIDAN (*turning to her quickly*)

What is it?

LUCILLE

Are . . . are you awfully in love with the leading lady?

SHERIDAN (*theatrically raising his eyes to the ceiling*)

In love with her. . . . Ye gods!

LUCILLE

When you played here it looked so to me from where I sat.

SHERIDAN

But that was only stage love.

LUCILLE

Stage love? Why, what 's the difference?

SHERIDAN (*rather put to it for a definition, but determined to settle the business*) Why, the difference between stage love and real love is that . . . that the more you make love the less you want to and . . . er . . . and in real love why . . . (*getting a flash of inspiration*) the less you make love the *more* you want to.

LUCILLE (*the flash being too brilliant for her immediate grasp*) Oh! . . . (*A slight pause, the light comes, and a smile irradiates her face; she draws a long, happy breath*) Oh!

SHERIDAN (*in his best stage manner*)

Until the twenty-seventh, adieu. (*Kisses her hand and goes out and on his way*)

LUCILLE

Good-bye. (*She is startled and delighted at the kissing of her hand; she stands in the door holding*

the screen partly open and watches Sheridan going blithely down the street; then she holds the back of her hand to her face caressingly)

IVY (*sticking her head out of the parlor door and making a noise to attract Lucille's attention*) Pst . . . pst . . . (*sotto voce*) Is he gone?

LUCILLE (*falling suddenly to earth*)
Yes.

IVY
Well, Lucille Perkins, ain't you the case?

LUCILLE (*coming down to table and resuming her lessons*) What do you mean?

IVY
Havin' an actor callin' on you.

LUCILLE
What of it?

IVY
It seems awful dangerous to me.

LUCILLE
Dangerous . . . why?

IVY
Why, they 're so fascinatin'. They jest lure a girl on and on, and then leave her to die of a broken heart.

LUCILLE (*laughing*)
Oh, Ivy!

IVY
I 've read about 'em in novels.

LUCILLE
What trash.

IVY
I 'll lend you one I 've got. It 's about a girl that fell in love with a —

STAR SKINNER (*at the screen door*)
Anybody home?

IVY (*screaming and covering her hair curlers*)
Don't let Star Skinner see me. (*She dashes off into the parlor again, leaving the door open behind her*)

LUCILLE
Why, Star!

STAR
Hello, Lucille!

LUCILLE (*with a minimum of cordiality*)
Won't you come in?

[*Star enters. He is a rather good-looking youth of nineteen or twenty, dressed in the best country manner, which is a trifle flashy as to tie, handkerchief, hose, and jewellery. His bearing is such as befits the only son of Gosport's richest citizen and a good catch. His speech is that of the small town boy who "hated school" and who dissipates his time and energies in the local billiard parlor, loafing in the front doorway of his father's "Dry Goods Emporium," or driving about to the neighboring towns in his smart little top buggy. At the present moment he seems to be nursing a grievance which Lucille's easy indifference inflames.*

STAR
Can't stay, my horse ain't hitched. (*He fidgets with his hat for a moment before coming to the point*) I want to know if you 'll go to the lecture with me next Friday night.

LUCILLE (*with the callousness of a girl who is sure of her victim*) Oh, I don't know.

STAR
You don't know? . . . Say, look here, Lucille, ever

since that actor fellow Sheridan played here, you 've treated me like a speckled pup.

LUCILLE (*his language particularly jarring after Sheridan's charming diction*) That 's a nice way to talk.

STAR

Well, you have. Here we been keepin' company fer six months . . . and I 've taken you to everything that was goin' on . . . you know I did, too . . . even after your Maw started fightin' Paw in the " Clarion."

LUCILLE (*rising and clearing books off the table*)

I 'm not to blame for what mother says in the paper.

STAR

Maybe not, but it makes Paw madder than a hatter about my goin' with you.

LUCILLE (*with the sensations of a small Catherine of Russia*) Don't do it then.

STAR (*in a perfect perspiration*)

That 's all the credit I get. If that ain't jest like a girl.

LUCILLE (*taking a tablecloth from the sideboard drawer and spreading it on the table*) I 'm sure I 've never encouraged you.

STAR

Well, you never *dis*couraged me till that cheap actor came to town.

LUCILLE (*instantly seeing red*)

He is n't a cheap actor.

STAR

Ten, twent', and thirt'.

LUCILLE (*for the moment capable of murder*)

Star Skinner, you —

STAR

Well, what 's he doin' here in town to-day? I saw him come in here.

LUCILLE (*realizing her weakness in betraying her feelings and returning to her former refined method of torture*) Better ask *him.* (*She begins to lay the silver*)

STAR (*the hook once more firmly in his gills*)

Shoot! . . . (*Watching the artistic precision she employs in her task*) I don't want to quarrel . . . and I don't care much what Paw says. (*Discovers that she is softly humming a gay little tune*) Well. . . . Oh, say, *will* you go to the lecture with me?

LUCILLE

You 'd better ask someone else.

STAR

I don't want to take anyone else . . . you know that. Not that I can't. . . . Ivy Wilcox would jump at the chance if I 'd ask her.

LUCILLE

Pshhe!

[*She pantomimes to him that Ivy is in the parlor listening. Panic stricken for the moment, he bolts for the door, then is seized of the fact that he has n't got anywhere with Lucille.*

STAR (*quite humbly*)

Are you comin' to choir meetin' to-night?

LUCILLE

Yes.

STAR (*with inspiration*)

Well, if you *will* go to the lecture with me, wear a blue ribbon in your hair.

[*Before she can answer, Claud Whitcomb appears in the door at left, from the kitchen, and raps on the casing with his whipstock, having stalked through the back way in true democratic fashion.*

CLAUD

Hello, Lucille! . . . Hello, Star!

STAR

Hello, Claud!

[*Claud is a tall, lanky specimen of the small farmer. Age anywhere between thirty and forty. His weather-beaten, faded garments and cap are of that indescribable hue common to farmers and dried earth. His attitude toward his fellows is that of liberty, equality, and fraternity.*

CLAUD (*to Star*)

Goin' back to the store?

STAR

Yes.

CLAUD

Say, how you sellin' white vests?

STAR

Ministers one dollar, common folks two. (*Goes out*)

CLAUD (*staggered at this revelation of class privilege*)

Ministers one dollar, common folks two. (*Scratching his ear as a philosophical stimulant*) . . . Well, by hookey, it pays to be a minister, now don't it? . . . (*Returning to the commonplaces of life*) Is your Maw to hum, Lucille?

LUCILLE (*continuing the setting of the table*)

Not yet.

CLAUD

I got a little jag of wood out here. I thought she

might like it fer kitchen use. Beech and maple, seasoned all winter. I ought to know, fer I split it myself.

LUCILLE

You 'll have to wait and ask mother.

CLAUD

I wish she 'd hurry. I want to go down and see the seven-fifteen come in. I missed the three-forty-two.

LUCILLE

Won't you sit down?

CLAUD

Guess I might as well.

[*He takes a dining-chair and, placing it against the lower casing of the kitchen door, sits tilted back, his feet on the chair rungs and his head against the wall. A knock comes at the screen door and Lucille goes up and opens it, admitting Miss Faxon, who is carrying an imitation leather travelling satchel. Miss Faxon is the remains of the prehistoric "Pretty Milliner." Fifty-five years spent for the most part in the study and decoration of the females of Gosport and its vicinity have considerably ravaged her original charms. Keeping pace with her experience, her figure has broadened as well. Her hair has not escaped the snows of Time, but its aging effects have been mitigated by a bright chestnut water-wave, worn across the upper brow. This arrangement results in a cheerful if startling contrast to the gray temples. A liberal use of liquid first aid to the complexion and a more or less discreet application of rouge on the cheek bones give to the lady a lively if not altogether human aspect. Her hat is a marvel of constructive trimming, embracing various feathers rampant and*

bows, rosettes, and buckles couchant. The ensemble suggests an attempt to depict, sartorially and simultaneously, the five styles of architecture. Her gown and wrap of sterling material are evidently hangovers from the Victorian period remodelled and embellished to meet the demands of the prevailing mode. Having, during the early days of her dispensation, been discovered in the act of eating an oyster supper in the rear section of Gosport's only restaurant with a married man, she has found the climb to her present respectable eminence a difficult one. By dint of hard labor in the Methodist Church, its Ladies' Aid Bazaars and Picnics, by her devotion and zeal in the United Order of the Sons and Daughters of Freedom, and by her unflagging spirit at Flag Raisings and Old Folks Concerts, her early indiscretion has been overlooked, and she is now numbered among Gosport's "best people." Occasionally her fancy turns to thoughts of love, not in the old mad way, but because of a virtuous longing to "settle down and make some good man happy."

LUCILLE

Oh, how do you do, Miss Faxon? Won't you come in?

MISS FAXON (*entering the room*)

Is your maw here?

LUCILLE

No, she has n't come yet. Won't you sit down?

MISS FAXON (*settling herself in a rocker*)

I went to the "Clarion" office and she wan't there, so I came on here.

[*Claud and Miss Faxon exchange a little nod of recognition.*

LUCILLE

Are you going away?

MISS FAXON

Yes. I 'm goin' on the seven-fifteen to Indianapolis. They 's excursion rates to-day, so I thought I 'd go up and git the Fall styles.

LUCILLE

I see.

MISS FAXON

I wanted to leave a personal with yer maw and change my *ad*vertisement.

LUCILLE

Leave them with me; I 'll give them to mother.

MISS FAXON

Well, I want to get her opinion about my *ad*vertisement. Now Miss Culver has changed her *ad*vertisement from " stylish " to " artistic " millinery. Ain't that silly? Jest as if she was sellin' oil paintin's instid of hats.

LUCILLE

Oh, has she? I had n't noticed.

MISS FAXON (*with honest pride*)

Now my ad. has stood " Fine Millinery " fer nineteen years, but now I 'm goin' to change it to " *Re*fined," and, if I do say it, *re*fined hats is my speciality.

LUCILLE

Do you know what the styles will be this Fall?

MISS FAXON

Oh, I 've a gineral idee. Side effects in trimmin', bandeaux ginerally under the brim, lower crowns and wider rims, birds and breasts as usual, and ostrich feathers more so.

LUCILLE

Oh!

CLAUD

Whew!

MISS FAXON (*nervously rising and going to window*) I told Linc Watkins to stop here fer me with the bus. I 'll have to wait a spell, I guess, fer I don't see it comin' yet. . . . My land, if here ain't Mr. Skinner. What in the world! . . . He hates yer maw like pison! . . . Why, it must be he knows I 'm here and is comin' to see me off. Now don't that beat all?

LUCILLE

Mr. Skinner coming here?

MISS FAXON (*coming down and speaking for Lucille's ear alone*) It 's the most astonishing thing the way widowers is always attracted by milliners. . . . (*Raising a warning finger*) Don't never be a milliner, Lucille, if you don't want to be run after.

[*Knock at the screen door. Miss Faxon settles herself in an effective attitude in Lucille's chair.*

LUCILLE (*goes up to the door and opens it with a more formal tone and manner than she has employed with the other callers*) Come in, Mr. Skinner.

[*Skinner brushes by her. He is a man nearing sixty, well preserved, vital, keen, and narrow. He has the assurance of one who has forged ahead, made money, and gotten a financial grip on his community. He has ambition and sufficient imagination to attempt higher flights than his neighbors, but is too egotistical to realize his limitations. He is very well dressed in a countrified way, well fed, but too dynamic to accumulate fat.*

SKINNER

Good evening, Lucille. Well, well, Miss Faxon. . . . Howdy, Claud? . . . (*By way of being chatty*) Nice day we 've had.

MISS FAXON

Yes, fine fer travellin'.

IVY WILCOX (*with a shrill scream dashes across the room from the parlor, through the kitchen, her hands covering her curl papers*) Oh, don't anybody look at me. . . . Please don't look. . . . Don't you dare look!

[*All are stunned at the passing cyclone.*

SKINNER

Well, I swan!

MISS FAXON

My land!

CLAUD

Gee whittaker! (*He nearly falls off his chair as the apparition passes him*)

SKINNER

What was that?

LUCILLE

Only Ivy Wilcox.

ALL (*as if the explanation were ample*)

Oh!

LUCILLE

Will you excuse me? (*She goes into the kitchen as if to prepare supper*)

SKINNER (*observing Miss Faxon's satchel*)

Goin' up to the city?

MISS FAXON (*with a traveller's importance*)

Yes.

SKINNER

Buyin' Fall goods?

MISS FAXON

Yes.

SKINNER

I ought to go, but on account of the political situation I can't leave town just now. (*Casually picks up a cooky from a dish on the table and eats it with discriminating relish*)

MISS FAXON (*sympathetically interested*)

Do you think you kin carry the nomination, Mr. Skinner? Rome Preston is runnin' you pretty hard, they say.

SKINNER

Shucks! I kin beat Rome Preston all-fired holler. (*Feeling that his audience may not share his certainty*) . . . Least ways, I kin if Mis' Perkins will stop fightin' me in the "Clarion."

MISS FAXON (*succumbing to a champion's prejudice*)

For my part, although I like Mis' Perkins, and no one can't say I don't, and I proposed her name for our United Order of the Sons and Daughters of Freedom, it does seem to me that runnin' a newspaper ain't as womanly as *some* occupations I could mention.

SKINNER (*in his platform manner*)

Spoken like a true woman and a credit to the Sons and Daughters of Freedom. Eh, Claud?

CLAUD

You bet! (*This tribute is delivered out of pure amiability and not conviction*)

SKINNER (*clinching his hold on the ladies' partisanship*)
You, Miss Faxon, are cast in a more delicate mould, so to speak, than Mis' Perkins.

MISS FAXON
My land, Mr. Skinner, but you kin be poetical!

SKINNER (*delighted at the effect he is producing*)
Oh, I kin do most anything I turn my hand to . . . and so Rome Preston 'll find out.

MISS FAXON (*suddenly experiencing a pang of doubt*)
Rome 's a smart fellow, though.

SKINNER
Oh, he 's got that university kind of smartness; but what does that amount to, I want to know? (*Miss Faxon is unable to answer his query and he turns a questioning glare on Claud, who rises to the occasion*)

CLAUD
Don't amount to shucks!

SKINNER
What the constituents of this here district wants to represent them in the legislater is a man that fer years has ben helpin' to build up the commerce of this country; a man that fer years has clothed the citizens of this county; (*crescendo*) a man that in rain or shine has stood in his place and sold goods that was all wool and a yard wide.

CLAUD (*not entirely borne off his feet*)
Leastways, *half* wool and *nearly* a yard wide.

SKINNER (*nettled at this poorly veiled allusion to his trade habits*) I was talkin' to Miss Faxon, young man.

MISS FAXON
Goodness, Mr. Skinner, but you do remind me of Senator Albert J. Beveridge.

SKINNER

Well, they do say that I am a powerful speaker.

LINC WATKINS (*bawling at the screen door*)

All aboar-r-d for the sev-en-fif-tee-een!

MISS FAXON (*coming down from the blue with a shock*)

My land, Linc Watkins, you need n't take our heads off.

LINC (*entering the room; he is a short, stout man and wears a long, heavy, fur coat and a straw hat*)

I don't cal'late on any of my passengers gittin' left. (*Takes off hat and mops his face with his handkerchief*)

SKINNER

Great Cæsar's ghost, Linc, what are you doin' with a fur coat on this time of year?

LINC

Why, a travellin' man left it with me and said if I 'd take care of it fer him, I could have the use of it till he comes on his next trip. Thought I 'd take advantage of the offer as I don't expect to ever git another chanst to wear a fur coat.

MISS FAXON

Land of Goshen!

SKINNER

I don't see how you stand it, Linc.

LINC

I ben near givin' in several times, but I 'm afraid if I take it off now I 'll ketch cold.

CLAUD

Well, thet beats all!

LINC

Mis' Perkins home yet? I want to give her some items.

SKINNER

I understand that you do consid'able writin' fer the "Clarion," Linc.

LINC

Yes. I reckon I 'm what you might call the "Clarion's" society editor.

PORTIA (*from the porch*)

Hello, Chicks! (*Enters room briskly. She is a healthy, glowing, breezy woman of thirty-five or six, well preserved and poised. Her sharp experiences of life have given her control of a deep emotional nature and put a keen edge on her sense of humor and the humanities. She is dressed becomingly in a business-like summer gown and hat. As she breezes into the room she has an air of bright expectancy*) Where are my chickens? (*Comes to a stop as she realizes the absence of her family and the presence of several outsiders*) Well . . . well, howdy do, folks? What is this? Giving me a donation party? (*Takes off her hat and puts it on hat-stand*) Good gracious, Linc Watkins, you 'll melt in that coat.

LINC

I 'm gittin' kind of used to it now.

PORTIA

You 've raised the temperature of this room ten degrees. Well, out with it; I see by your eye that you 've got an item for the "Clarion." (*Takes a small pad and pencil from a side pocket in her dress*)

LINC (*with considerable mental labor*)

The chambermaid at the hotel, Libby Morehouse, is engaged to a feller from Kokomo.

PORTIA (*writing rapidly*)

Fine for Libby, but bad for the hotel.

LINC

Mrs. Ike Davis is goin' to visit her mother, who 's sick, on account of the cheap tickets.

PORTIA (*writing*)

Hope the tickets don't prove fatal. Anything more?

LINC

Not till the train comes in. If there 's any news at the deepo I 'll stop on my way back. A-l-l-l aboar-r-d-d for the seven-fiftee . . . . een.

[*Miss Faxon hastily scrambles for her bag.*

PORTIA (*slipping pad in pocket*)

Going, Miss Faxon?

MISS FAXON

Yes, I 'm goin' to the city to git the Fall styles.

PORTIA (*whipping out the pad again in the way of the chronic news gatherer*) When shall you return?

MISS FAXON

To-morrow noon.

PORTIA (*writing*)

That 's quick work, is n't it?

MISS FAXON

It will give me two hours in the wholesale house. No use stayin' in the city on expense.

LINC (*outside*)

All aboar-r-r-r-rd!

MISS FAXON

Lucille will tell you about the change in my ad.; I want it in to-morrow's "Clarion." (*Sweetly*) Are you goin' down to the train, Mr. Skinner?

[*Skinner has avoided a direct exchange of looks or words with Portia since her entrance, and has put in the time talking with Claud in presenting him with a campaign cigar.*

SKINNER

No, I want to have a talk with Mrs. Perkins.

MISS FAXON (*her face freezing*)

Oh, indeed!

LINC (*outside, crescendo*)

All-l-l aboar-r-r-r-r-d-d-d!!!

MISS FAXON (*running out the door*)

Oh, my Land!

CLAUD (*coming over to Portia and drawling*)

Say, Mis' Perkins, I got a cord of kitchen wood out here, sixteen inch beech and maple, seasoned all winter; I ought to know, 'cause I split it myself.

PORTIA

Look here, Claud Whitcomb, that 's the same song you sung about that last load I bought of you, and it was nothing but ash and green pine. It nearly smoked us out of the kitchen.

CLAUD

Well, *this* is all right.

PORTIA

How much do you want for it?

CLAUD

Well, it 's worth a dollar and a quarter.

PORTIA

What?

CLAUD

But seein' as it 's gettin' late you kin hev it fer a dollar.

PORTIA

All right. Throw it into the yard by the kitchen porch.

CLAUD (*sauntering up to the door*)

Say, will it do jest as well if I put it in after a while? I want to go down and see the seven-fifteen come in.

PORTIA (*whipping out pad and pencil*)

Expecting anyone?

CLAUD

No; I jest want to see it come in.

PORTIA (*with pencil poised*)

Then what?

CLAUD

I 'll watch it pull out again. (*He goes out*)

PORTIA (*laughing as she tosses her pad and pencil on the table*) Powerful mental stimulant. (*Her expression hardens as she turns and faces Skinner*) Well, Mr. Skinner, it 's something of a surprise to see you in my house.

SKINNER (*finding it difficult to maintain his superior attitude*) I can't say that you 've ever exactly invited me.

PORTIA

However, sit down and tell me the reason I am so unexpectedly honored. (*She places a chair facing him at the left of the table, while he seats himself in a rocking-chair*)

SKINNER (*with an attempt at neighborliness*)

I suppose you have noticed that your girl, Lucille, and my boy, Star, have been keepin' pretty stiddy company lately.

PORTIA

Only childish nonsense and not to be taken seriously at all. That is n't what brought you here.

SKINNER (*meeting her questioning look squarely*)
Well, mebbe it wan't. (*There is a little pause and his tone sharpens*) I ben told that you was callin' on old Mis' Miller out on the Hancock Road. Is that so?

PORTIA
Yes, it is. I got a very valuable bit of your business history out there too. Something that I think the voters of this district will be glad to know about. So I 'm going to tell them in the " Clarion."

SKINNER
Say, you ain't goin' to rake up that old affair, are you?

PORTIA
I certainly am. I can't conscientiously keep it from my subscribers. If the people want to send you to the legislature, they can, but they 'll do it with their eyes open.

SKINNER (*unable to cope with this calm, determined, and candid female, loses his temper*) You 're doin' this fer Rome Preston.

PORTIA
I 'm doing everything I know to help Rome Preston's nomination, if that 's what you mean.

SKINNER
I knew it.

PORTIA
As nearly as possible, Rome Preston will do what the voters send him to Indianapolis *to* do.

SKINNER
Well, won't I?

PORTIA
You? . . . Mr. Skinner, the only way we have of

judging a man's future is by his past. You got your start in life, you and your father, stealing mules from the United States Government during the Civil War. You 've squeezed every farmer within twenty miles with your usury. You 've sweated the money out of the men, women, and girls in the knitting factory. You 're not a man who could withstand the temptation of a corporation bribe, and as a representative you would n't run straight a week.

SKINNER (*leaping out of his chair and shaking his fist*) Do you know, I kin have the law on you fer defamation of my honor.

PORTIA (*calmly, as she rises from her chair*) I can't defame what never existed. . . . This is a fight to the finish, Mr. Skinner, but I don't like to pull off even one round in my own house.

SKINNER

You jest keep on and see how long you hev a house or anything else. You want to remember that you ain't paid fer your press yit.

PORTIA (*with a sudden catch in her breath*) You mean . . . ?

SKINNER

I mean go slow with that Miller story, or the bank *may* not renew your notes.

PORTIA

Because you are one of the directors?

SKINNER

That 's about it.

PORTIA (*counting the cost for a moment before she speaks*) All right, Mr. Skinner. It is my duty to help nominate an honest man, and so I 'm going to do it.

SKINNER

Nominatin' ain't electin'.

PORTIA

Yes it is, in this district, when the nominee is an honest man and a democrat.

SKINNER (*quite beside himself, pacing the room and occasionally stopping in front of Portia to emphasize a point*) Hm. . . . Hm. . . . Everybody says Rome Preston is courtin' you and that 's the reason you 're fightin' fer him. . . . You 're a widow-womern . . . leastwise you pass fer one, and bein' the Honorable Mrs. Preston would n't be a bad move fer you.

PORTIA (*staggered at this construction of her partisanship for Preston; when she finds her voice she speaks evenly, but with cold wrath*) If you 've relieved your mind of all the rubbish that 's in it, it 's a good time for you to start home. (*Skinner is a bit startled and subdued by her icy calmness and starts for the door; when he reaches it, she speaks again in the same dispassionate voice*) Just a word. . . . Whether I 'm a widow or not need n't keep you or Gosport awake nights. Mr. Preston is the best friend and the finest gentleman I 've ever known. . . . As to his courting affairs, I know nothing of them, but any woman that Rome Preston marries will get a man . . . do you understand? . . . A man that knows how to put up a fight, and he does n't fight poor old women like Mrs. Miller either. Good night. (*Goes up and stands looking out of the window with her back to him*)

SKINNER (*fumbling the catch on the screen door for a moment and trying to find suitable expression for*

his feelings; failing, he glares at Portia's back) Does n't fight women, eh? . . . Well. . . . I guess that 's where he shows his good sense. (*He goes out, slamming the door*)

[*Portia stands at the window watching Skinner off the premises; then with a bitter sigh and a letting down of the tense muscles she seats herself at the sewing machine, and picking up the unfinished waist, begins to work on it, stitching on the machine. Lucille, wearing a kitchen apron over her dress, enters from the kitchen, carrying a covered dish of food. She has evidently been crying, and her face wears an angry pout. She rattles the dish angrily as she places it on the table, as if to attract attention to her wrathful mood.*

LUCILLE

Will you eat now, or are you going to wait for Girlie?

PORTIA (*thinking too deeply to note Lucille's temper*) We 'll wait for Girlie. (*Lucille picks up the dining-chair at left of the table, slams it into place with a bang, and starts for the kitchen; Portia's attention is caught*) Lucille. . . . (*Lucille continues on her way*) Lucille dear!

LUCILLE (*stops in her tracks, but does not turn*) What?

PORTIA

Did you hear what that man said?

LUCILLE

Yes.

PORTIA

Well, don't mind it, dearie; he 's trying to bluff me out of doing my duty, that 's all.

LUCILLE (*the angry words tumbling over each other*)
Yes, and you 'd sacrifice everything rather than give in.

PORTIA (*rising and coming toward Lucille*)
Sacrifice? . . . What do you mean?

LUCILLE
You 'll make old Skinner so mad that he 'll set Star against us.

PORTIA
Are you interested in Star after all? I thought it was that young actor chap, Sheridan.

LUCILLE (*in a passion of vehemence*)
Star Skinner *lives* here, and he 's the only one to go anywhere with. He 's the richest boy in town, and if he gets down on us on account of his father, I can just stay at home all winter and never see anything or go anywhere. . . . It does n't make any difference to *you* how my good times are spoiled.

PORTIA (*quietly and hiding the hurt of the girl's words*)
Oh, that 's it! (*Lucille flirts her back to her mother and Portia goes over and puts her hands on the girl's shoulders*) Is this my little partner, my girl, that 's talking? . . . (*Lucille jerks her shoulder and sulks*) So you believe that I don't care for your happiness . . . and you think that your little sweethearting is the most important thing in the world . . . of course.

LUCILLE
Well, I don't care, you always . . .

PORTIA
Don't . . . don't answer me just yet. You are too angry and you 'll say things that will hurt us both. While we 're waiting for Girlie, I want you to go up

to the west room and look at the sunset glow and think of the Wise Fly.

LUCILLE

I don't know anything about the Wise Fly.

PORTIA

Don't you? Well, a fly's range of vision, dear, is about nine feet; and once there was a Wise Fly that lit on the dome of Saint Peter's in Rome, and as he gazed nine whole feet around him, he said: "My, what a great world we live in." . . . Go upstairs and think about it, dear. (*Lucille goes sullenly up the stairs; as she nears the top, Portia speaks again with a weary note in her voice*) And, dearie, look back as far as you can before you decide whether I care for your happiness or not. . . . I've been handicapped too; remember that, if you can.

[*Lucille goes out silently and disappears down the passage. Portia looks after her for a moment; her tense attitude breaks a little, and over her face comes the look of a runner who is beaten. She gathers herself up and in an automatic manner goes back to the sewing. Gradually the wheel turns more slowly and comes to a stop; Portia's head drops down on her arms over the crumpled work, and her shoulders shake with suppressed sobs. A man's figure passes the window and appears at the screen door. He knocks. Portia does not hear him.*

ROME PRESTON (*speaking and opening the door at once*) Portia! (*He speaks again to attract her attention*) Portia!

[*Preston is a clean-cut, vigorous man of forty, attractive, frank, sincere, and with the rather pic-*

turesque manner and dress of the traditional lawyer of the West and South. His voice and enunciation suggest the platform orator and effective pleader. His eyes rest upon Portia with eager sympathy.

PORTIA (*scrambling to her feet and furtively wiping her eyes*) Oh, hello, Rome!

PRESTON (*following Portia into the centre of the room*) May I come in?

PORTIA (*regaining her self-control*) Yes, do.

PRESTON (*manlike, he is awkward when he is confronted with traces of tears, but his eyes are all tenderness*) Pardon me for intruding. . . . I was going home. . . . I usually see you folks at supper through the window at this time.

PORTIA

Girlie is n't home yet. We are waiting for her.

PRESTON

And you 're not your old cheery self to-night.

PORTIA

I 'm rather tired and fagged.

PRESTON

I 've seen you when you were tired and fagged before, Portia, but your head was always up.

PORTIA (*the tears starting at his understanding*) Oh, it 's nothing.

PRESTON

It is these infernal politics. . . . I wish you 'd drop me and go over to Skinner, if it will make it any easier for you.

PORTIA (*with a whimsical smile*)

I 've a tender conscience and I must live up to it. The " Clarion " has stood for the whitest man in the

race for office ever since I took hold of it. I'm not going to change the policy of the paper now. . . . Won't you sit down?

PRESTON

No, my calling here won't do you any good with the town gossips just now. . . . I could n't pass on when I saw you there like that.

PORTIA

You *are* kind, Rome.

PRESTON

I wish you would give me the right to end all these worries and take care of you and the children.

PORTIA

You remember what I told you when you spoke to me before?

PRESTON

Yes, but I can't see why you should waste all the rest of your life. If your husband is living, which I very much doubt, the law will give you a divorce on the grounds of desertion and non-support.

PORTIA (*wearily dropping into a chair*)

I know.

PRESTON

Let me get it for you. You have told me that you were only a child when you married, that you had never loved him as a wife should, and that he was equally indifferent. Why not put an end to this unnatural situation?

PORTIA

I can't do it.

PRESTON

But I can do it for you.

PORTIA

Don't tempt me, Rome.

PRESTON

Portia!

PORTIA

It *is* a temptation, I confess. . . . After Hiram left us I got as far up-state as I could with the youngsters, . . . got where no one would know the story or would tell it to them. I 've brought the girls up to believe their father was like other men. . . . If I do what you ask, I 've got to pull down their ideal of him. . . . I can't help feeling that pride in the character of those we spring from goes a long way toward helping us to be decent men and women ourselves. . . . No, Rome, the children's happiness comes before mine every time. Indeed, their happiness *is* mine. (*Rising*) I can't do it. (*Whimsically*) Besides, if I got a divorce and married you, I 'd have to give up my office, and then where would Gosport get its job printing done?

PRESTON

Seriously, Portia . . .

PORTIA

You 're trying to bribe a public blessing, Rome. No, we 'll let the old sign "PERKINS THE PRINTER" stand.

PRESTON (*going up to the door*)

Well, I 'll go on waiting. I 've waited eight years now . . . that ought to give me something of a reputation for patience.

PORTIA (*following him and extending her hand*)

You 're a brick, Rome; but don't go on waiting . . .

and . . . and don't waste your life because I've spoiled mine.

PRESTON (*returning her hand and looking straight into her eyes*) Don't you want me to wait?

PORTIA

Why, Rome . . . I . . . I . . .

PRESTON

Had you rather I *would n't* wait?

PORTIA (*snatching her hand away and waving him off with a forced laugh*) Go along to your office, I won't incriminate myself.

[*Preston laughs and goes out. Portia goes to the machine, picks up the sewing, and resumes her work, humming softly to herself. Lucille, her face cleared of the recent storm, comes quietly down the stairs; she goes up behind her mother and puts her arms about her neck.*

LUCILLE

Mother, if you 'd put me in a pint measure just now, you 'd lose me.

PORTIA

That 's my girl!

LUCILLE

I 'm afraid I can't see much further than the Wise Fly, but I 'm sorry I was so mean.

PORTIA

You 've given me credit for doing my best, so we won't say anything more about it. (*Gives her an affectionate squeeze and Lucille goes into the kitchen*)

[*Mary Jane bolts through the door in a breathless manner, as if she had been running, throws her books on the couch, and tosses her hat on the hat-stand.*

She is a healthy girl of twelve, wholesome, normal, simple, and attractive; much such a child as Portia might have been at her age. Her plump calves and ruddy cheeks, together with a charming literalness, indicate that while her sister Lucille's temperament causes that young person to lie awake of nights, longing and seeing visions of the wonderful world of people and things, Mary Jane's is conducive of that sweet, sound sleep common to all good-tempered and well-nourished young animals.

MARY JANE

Hello, Mumsey, did you think I was lost?

PORTIA

We were beginning to. We 're all nearly starved to death.

[*She lights a shaded lamp and places it on the supper table. Mary Jane goes to the right side of the table and sits down. Portia serves her, pouring out a glass of milk, etc.*

LINC WATKINS (*on porch*)

Oh, Miss Perkins!

PORTIA (*reaching for pad and pencil*)

Yes, Linc.

LINC (*opening the screen part way and sticking his body half through the door*) Can't stop. . . . Two drummers in the bus rippin' mad 'cause I *did* stop. (*With an effort of memory*) . . . Mandy Lansing 's come home from Wabash fer a three days' visit. (*Portia writes*) New lot of agricultural instruments on the deepo platform. . . . Roy Fenwick is spellin' Jim Abbott, the baggage master, 'cause Jim 's goin' to a dance out on the Hancock Road.

VOICE (*from the street*)

Say, driver, are you going to take me to the hotel or not?

LINC

I 'm comin'.

VOICE

Well, you hurry up.

LINC

I 'll die if I hurry in this coat. . . . Good night, Mis' Perkins. (*Exits*)

PORTIA

Good night, Linc.

[*Lucille enters with teapot and dishes of food, which she places on the table. A light blue ribbon bow is on the back of her hair. She goes up to the hat-stand, gets her hat, and takes a book of anthems from the bookcase.*

LUCILLE

I ate my supper in the kitchen, mother. It 's time for choir meeting now. (*She adjusts her hat, her back being turned to the others*)

PORTIA

All right, dear, run along. I 'll do the dishes to-night.

MARY JANE

Is n't that my hair ribbon, Lucille?

LUCILLE

Yes, may I wear it?

PORTIA

Better say yes, Girlie.

MARY JANE (*resigned*)

Well . . . all right.

LUCILLE (*going out the door*)

I 'll be back by nine, mother.

PORTIA

I 'll be up sewing. (*Portia resumes her supper, presently observing Mary Jane, who is leaning her chin on her hand in a dejected manner*) What 's the matter, Chicken, you 're not eating?

MARY JANE

I 'm not hungry.

PORTIA

What kept you so late?

MARY JANE

Lessons. . . . Minnie and I did them together.

PORTIA

More grammatical analysis?

MARY JANE

Worse. . . . arithmetic . . . compound interest.

PORTIA

No wonder you were late.

MARY JANE

That was n't what made me so late, though.

PORTIA

No? What else, then?

MARY JANE (*bursting into tears, her head down on her arm on the table*) Oh, Mumsey, don't ask me.

PORTIA

Why, *dearie!* . . . *My,* but this is a wet day in the Perkins family. . . . *You* have n't a sweetheart too, have you? (*Mary Janes shakes her head without raising it*) Come here, then, come to your mother and tell her what 's breaking your poor little heart. (*Pushes her chair back, and as Mary Jane, not grown up enough to refuse this comfort, comes to*

her, she cuddles her in the way mothers have employed since history began) Have you and Minnie had a fuss?

MARY JANE

I 'll never speak to her again as long as I live.

PORTIA

As serious as that?

MARY JANE

Em-hm.

PORTIA

Did she call names?

MARY JANE

I . . . I . . . it was n't about m-me . . . it was about . . . y-y-youooo.

PORTIA

Oh, about me. . . . Well?

MARY JANE

Sh-she said you were a regular suf-fer-a-gister.

PORTIA

Did she?

MARY JANE (*controlling her tears and sitting up*)

She said you were in love with Mr. Preston, and that 's why you told the people to vote for him.

PORTIA (*listening seriously*)

I 'm still alive, Girlie. Anything else?

MARY JANE

Yes, and the worst of all.

PORTIA

Then let 's have " the worst of all."

MARY JANE

I-it 's about . . . about . . . father.

PORTIA (*tensely*)

Oh!

MARY JANE

Minnie said, she did n't believe I ever had any father.

PORTIA

Did she? . . . Go on.

MARY JANE

And she said, if my father *was* dead, why did n't we have him in the cemetery like other folks.

PORTIA (*a little pause*)

Well?

MARY JANE

And she said that when we first came to Gosport and you took the " Clarion " and worked so hard, no one asked any questions; but now you were so bold in fighting for Mr. Preston's election, that folks would like to know something about Mr. Perkins.

PORTIA

Did Minnie think of all this herself?

MARY JANE

No, she said she heard Mr. Skinner and her mother talking.

PORTIA (*her face set and grim*)

Oh, Mrs. Hawkins and old Skinner. (*Finally her eyes come back to the child and her expression softens*) And so Minnie's cruel taunts broke my little girl's heart?

MARY JANE

No, Mumsey, it was n't what she said; but I felt bad because . . . because . . .

PORTIA

Because what, dear?

MARY JANE

Because I could n't answer her. I *don't* know where my father died or where he is buried.

PORTIA

Poor little chick!

MARY JANE

Oh, mother, why don't you tell us about father?

PORTIA

I . . . I haven't told you much about your father, have I?

MARY JANE

No.

PORTIA

And of course you were a baby, and Lucille hardly old enough to remember him when he . . . when he left us.

MARY JANE

And we haven't one single picture of him to show how he looked.

PORTIA

I've told you, dear, that your father was a very intelligent and unusual man. He was a scholar and . . . and . . .

MARY JANE

But *that* doesn't tell what his face looked like. And you *never* cry when you talk about him. . . . And every other widow in this town wears mourning, and . . .

PORTIA

Yes, but those widows don't have to run a printing office. They have more time to grieve.

MARY JANE

But *won't* you tell me what he . . .

PORTIA

Some day I'll tell you everything. I tell you now

that you have nothing to be ashamed of. . . . Trust mother, can't you?

MARY JANE

I will of course, Mumsey, but . . .

PORTIA

That 's right. (*Mary Jane stifles a generous yawn*) Sleepy already?

MARY JANE

Em-hm. I always get sleepy after I cry, don't you? . . . Oh, what a silly question . . . you never cry. . . . Did n't you ever?

PORTIA

Yes, there was a time when I cried a good deal.

MARY JANE (*in a matter-of-fact tone*)

Probably I won't cry when I 'm a woman.

PORTIA

When you 're past crying, dear, you 're past nearly everything that makes life worth living.

MARY JANE

Why, you talk . . .

PORTIA (*rising and forcing a laugh*)

I talk nonsense for a sleepy girl to go to bed on.

MARY JANE (*after kissing her mother good night*)

Want me to wipe the dishes?

PORTIA

No.

MARY JANE (*starting upstairs*)

I think I 'll go to bed then. . . . Don't forget to call me when you get up. I want to make some fudge before school. . . . (*Turning at the top*) Good night, Mumsey.

PORTIA

Good night, dearie.

[*She watches the child until she disappears down the passage; then her figure lets down dejectedly. At this moment the face of a man peers in at the window and then passes on. Portia goes over to the table, her appetite gone. She does not finish her supper, but picks up the dishes to clear the table. She is in the act of scraping Mary Jane's plate onto her own when a man opens the screen door softly and steps into the room. He is about forty years old, and his appearance is only a few removes from that of a tramp. His clothing and shoes are dusty as well as his hat; the latter, a soft felt of no particular color, is worn with a certain nonchalant grace. His face bears a three days' beard, and about his neck is a folded handkerchief in lieu of a collar.*

HIRAM (*gently*)

Pardon me.

[*At the sound of his voice Portia drops the plate she has in her hand and it crashes down on the other dishes; a cup falls to the floor and breaks. She is panic stricken for the moment. The man is cool, impudent, and not altogether unattractive.*

HIRAM

I fear I startled you.

PORTIA (*trying to be brave*)

Who are you, sir?

HIRAM (*removing his hat*)

Ah, Portia, that 's unkind.

PORTIA (*in a half whisper*)

Hiram. . . . Hiram Perkins!

HIRAM

Yes, it is I.

PORTIA (*transfixed and staring at him*)
Hiram Perkins!

HIRAM
That 's my name. A poor thing, but mine own.

PORTIA
Yes, it 's you.

HIRAM
You relieve me. I feared the ravages of time might have altered the expression of the lineaments that were once familiar, if not precisely dear, to you.

MARY JANE (*coming down the passage half undressed and unbuttoning the back of her under waist*)
Mumsey!

PORTIA (*terrified, warns Hiram to get out of sight; he softly steps back to the door in the shadow*) Yes?

MARY JANE
I thought I heard something smash.

PORTIA (*in a strained voice*)
I dropped a plate. . . . Go to bed, dear.

MARY JANE (*with a sleepy chuckle*)
I thought you were breaking up housekeeping. (*She goes out again, closing the passage door after her*)

HIRAM (*after a pause*)
Which one was that?

PORTIA
The baby.

HIRAM
Is it possible? (*Amiably*) I had no idea it had been so long.

PORTIA
It has been . . . *eleven* years.

HIRAM

It would have been only ten and a half, but that I had some difficulty in tracing you.

[*His eye is caught by the food on the table and a hungry look comes over his face; an eager, half-conscious movement toward the table attracts Portia's attention and she notes his pale, under-nourished appearance.*

PORTIA

Are you hungry?

HIRAM

At five this morning I partook of a light repast, consisting of a dried bun. . . . Need I say more? (*With a little bow that is half satirical*)

PORTIA (*taking the clean plate from Lucille's place back of the table and placing it to the left at Mary Jane's place, with the silver; gets a clean napkin from the sideboard drawer and places it; he watches these preparations with pleased but subdued interest*) Sit down and eat.

HIRAM

Thank you, I will. (*He tosses his hat on a chair near the table and seats himself, falling to like a half-famished man; Portia watches him for an instant, and then with sudden impulse goes to the bay window and pulls down the shades to the sill and closes the door; Hiram observes her action and smiles*) Ah, the neighbors. Yes. . . . I dare say they would remark my presence. (*With a shrug*) Ah, well . . . "honi soit qui mal y pense." . . . I suppose we had better break the news to them gently. (*Portia comes down to the left of the table, facing him*) May I trouble you for a cup of tea? (*She*

pours his tea) Not that I 'm addicted to the leaf, but to my mind, a woman pouring tea is a charming picture, especially if she have a good hand and arm. (*She passes him the cup across the table; his eyes rest on her wrist*) Yours are exceptional.

PORTIA

Oh, let up on that nonsense!

HIRAM

You will pardon me for saying so, Portia, but your English is not so pure as it used to be. "Let up" is not an expression that appeals to the cultured ear.

PORTIA

Eat what you want and then we 'll talk things over. [*She ignores his impertinence and stands watching him. His manner is delicate and ill accords with his shabby appearance.*

HIRAM (*breaking a piece of bread and examining it critically*) Your hospitality is enchanting. . . . By the way, Portia, there is a trifle too much flour in this bread. . . . You don't mind my saying so? . . . If you remember, cooking is one of my accomplishments, and bread-making my *chef d'œuvre.* (*Portia stares at him, speechless at his impudence; he catches her expression, but is unmoved by it and examines her appearance serenely*) You 've altered in the last ten years, Portia. My absence has agreed with you. You 've acquired height and weight, lines, curves, and expression. You 're no Diana now, but a Juno.

PORTIA (*seating herself opposite him*)

Keep your compliments.

HIRAM (*with a charming smile*)

I 'm not flirting with you, my dear. My admiration is purely Platonic. . . . (*Resuming his interest in*

the food) This veal loaf is badly seasoned. Who made it?

PORTIA (*driving the name home to him*)

Lucille.

HIRAM

The eldest?

PORTIA

Yes.

HIRAM

Lucille. . . . Yes . . . I remember. . . . You named her after Owen Meredith's heroine. I recollect standing out for Ariadne or Rosalind. You reacted to Mary Jane when the next one came along. . . . Hm. . . . Lucille must be quite a girl now.

PORTIA

She is *sixteen.*

HIRAM

By all the gods! . . . Sixteen. . . . As old as you were when we were married. . . . Good Heavens! (*Pause*) I remember her very distinctly. As an infant she gave promise of some temper and will power.

PORTIA

Lucille has a mind of her own.

HIRAM

Well, Cromwell says: "The mind is the man" . . . or woman, of course, as the case may be. (*Finishing*) If you don't object, I 'll conclude this *petit souper* with a smoke. (*She nods assent*) May I trouble you for a match? (*She indicates the sideboard back of him and he rises, pulling an old brier pipe from one pocket and an almost empty bag of cheap tobacco from the other; he fills the pipe*) This is

hardly such stuff as dreams are made of, but 't will serve. (*Gets match from sideboard, and as he ignites it gives a comprehensive and critical glance about the room, lights the pipe, and reseats himself, pulling contentedly at his pipe; Portia watches him, silent and patient and biding her time*)

PORTIA

Well?

HIRAM

Well?

PORTIA

Now I 'm ready to hear why you went away.

HIRAM

Does it really matter why?

PORTIA

No, but I 'm curious . . . that 's all.

HIRAM

Very naturally. . . . I 'm going to answer your question by asking one. . . . Why did you marry me?

PORTIA

You know.

HIRAM

I 'd like to have you put it in words.

PORTIA

Because I wanted to go on the big excursion to Niagara Falls. You had asked me to marry you. I said I would if you 'd buy me a round-trip ticket. You did.

HIRAM (*musing pleasantly*)

It has always been a mystery to me where I got that money.

PORTIA

I don't know, but you did, and I kept my promise.

HIRAM

Exactly. You had an inborn taste for travel. . . . So had I. . . . That 's why I went away.

PORTIA (*with a catch of her breath*)

Oh!

HIRAM

Yes, I heard the East a-callin', as Kipling says. That infernal little town and printing office had gotten on my nerves. . . . Pardon me, but you and the infants were also rather wearing. (*Her glare of repressed anger is quite lost upon him*) . . . Oh, not your fault; but the domestic hearth never had the charm for me that the poets claim for it.

PORTIA

I should say it had n't.

HIRAM (*a new note in his voice that is both real and bitter*) How could it have? What were my people? Boors . . . ignorant, shiftless, grovelling savages.

PORTIA

They were your own.

HIRAM

That does n't alter the facts. I was the only one of them that knew the inside of a book. Was it any wonder that my world existed between covers . . . that my own people did not interest me, and that I despised them?

PORTIA

For shame!

HIRAM

Not at all . . . it 's the truth. A son who cannot find common ground with his parents, and who lives

in a mental world that his brothers and sisters cannot enter, is not calculated ideally to realize a husband and father.

PORTIA

Then in God's name, why did you marry me?

HIRAM (*with a flash of real fire and feeling*)

You read books . . . and *understood* them . . . I thought. You did, too, until the children came, and then . . . then you were . . . well, maternal and impossible.

PORTIA

Ah!

HIRAM (*resuming his former manner*)

Of course, I 'm conscious of my own short-comings as a paterfamilias.

PORTIA

Never mind the apologies . . . go on.

HIRAM

Not to bore you with too many retrospections, a gentle but irresistible spirit of adventure prompted me, and I started out to see the world.

PORTIA

Well, have you seen it?

HIRAM (*nursing his knee in a glowing mood*)

I have . . . I 've girdled it . . . I 've slept beside the shrines in Mexico . . . I 've hauled at the nets off the Banks of Newfoundland . . . I 've been in London, as Shelley says: "That great sea, whose ebb and flow at once is deaf and loud" . . . I 've dined in the Quartier Latin . . . drank vodka with the traders at Nijni . . . campaigned with the Sudanese . . . listened to the temple bells of India . . . sipped tea with a mandarin . . . watched the

dancing of the geisha girls, and looked into the pathetic faces of the Cingalese. . . . Oh, I 've lived . . . I 've lived.

[*His voice trails off in reverie, and as he pulls at his pipe and sends up the cloud of smoke he sees past scenes and adventures in the hazy blue. His spirit quite detaches itself from the present and travels down the picturesque road of his faring. Portia has listened in bitter silence and now sits grimly contemplating him. Her voice comes low but vibrant.*

PORTIA

Did it ever occur to you to wonder what had become of us?

HIRAM (*tearing himself from his own thoughts*) I felt rather certain that you were still in Medairyville, as I could think of no logical way of you getting out of it.

PORTIA

Well, I *did* get out of it, as you see.

HIRAM

It' s nothing short of miraculous. . . . How did you manage it?

PORTIA

Thanks to your chronic distaste for work and my fool ambition to learn the printing business, I knew it pretty well by the time you skipped.

HIRAM

Pardon me, I did not " skip." The word is offensive. I departed . . . or migrated . . . but I did not " skip."

PORTIA (*ignoring his protest*)

Well, I traded the office in Medairyville and the ten

acres of scrub land my aunt left me for the office here in Gosport. . . . I 've done well with it.

HIRAM

Brava!

PORTIA

And that 's all there is to *my* story, Hiram Perkins.

HIRAM

Don't remind me of that ludicrous name. No man living, with literary aspirations, could rise above the influence of a name so hideous.

PORTIA

It 's had to be good enough for me.

HIRAM (*with an amused smile*)

Yes, I noticed the sign on your office: "PERKINS THE PRINTER." By Jove, you had courage to put it up.

PORTIA (*rising and going over to look at the clock, nervous and apprehensive*) It 's getting late, and Lucille is liable to come home at any moment. . . . What have you come here for . . . and what do you want?

HIRAM

I can't say that I have any definite expectations. . . . That 's the real charm of existence . . . allowing the casual to happen.

PORTIA

Have you any money? (*He shrugs his shoulders and, thrusting both hands in his pockets, finally brings up a few coppers, which he tosses on the table for her inspection*) What are you going to do for a living?

HIRAM

What a practical creature you are, Portia. I always

felt that a husband was really an obstacle to your personal success.

PORTIA

Have you a place to go?

HIRAM

"Be it ever so humble, there 's no place like . . ."

PORTIA

Do you mean to say that, after deserting us and leaving me to provide for the children, *now*, because you 're tired of drifting around, you expect me to take you back?

HIRAM

Really, my dear, you are telepathic . . . positively clairvoyant.

PORTIA

I like your cheek!

HIRAM

It is pleasant to know that you do, although the word is inelegant.

PORTIA

Rot! (*She takes a turn about the room to relieve her feelings*)

HIRAM

My dear, you owe me a debt of gratitude for giving you the opportunity to develop your unusual gifts; gifts which would have remained dormant had I not left you to demonstrate your possession of them.

PORTIA (*coming down and standing at the back of the table*) I 'm going to tell you something.

HIRAM

Terse and to the point.

PORTIA

I will *not* go back to the old life. Before I will live

with you again, I will appeal to the divorce courts. You know very well that you have given the law the power to free me of you.

HIRAM

Stated with the lucidity of a legal authority.

PORTIA

I 've won a place and a living here for the children and myself . . . I won't have that disturbed. They have no idea of the truth. They believe you to have been on the square with them and with me. I won't have their peace of mind spoiled.

HIRAM

Tennyson says: "The bearing and rearing of children is a woman's wisdom."

PORTIA (*finding this the "last straw"*)

You sit there and pour out your criticisms and quotations! You are not dealing with a girl now . . . you 're dealing with a woman.

HIRAM

And a very clever one, I grant you.

PORTIA

I 've gotten this home together by pinching, scrimping, and slaving. Do you think it 's been fun? Do you think it 's been play? Sometimes, let me tell you, it has been hell. . . . Well, while you watched the geisha girls dance, I washed and ironed and scrubbed. While you listened to the music of the temple bells, I ran a sewing machine until dawn. While you sipped tea with a mandarin, I stood by my press and worked with my hands covered with grease and ink. You went your way, and I 've gone mine. . . . This is *my* home and my children's. . . . Do you understand?

HIRAM (*in a subdued tone*)

Yes, I believe I quite get your meaning. (*He rises, puts the pipe in his pocket, and gets his hat from the chair above the table*) Portia, your heat is unnecessary, though becoming . . . you are really dramatic. (*Goes up to the door*) I hope I have n't spoiled your evening. (*Opens the door, which remains standing wide, and passes out through the screen door*) Good night.

PORTIA

Wait!

HIRAM

I don't wish to intrude a second time.

[*He stands for a moment silhouetted in the moonlight against the dark background of foliage, as if deciding which way he should take. Portia notes the indecision of the attitude and the wistful, shabby figure.*

PORTIA

Come back.

HIRAM

No, thank you.

PORTIA (*going to the door and pushing open the screen*)

Come in. I mean it. (*He reënters the room with a curious smile, as if inspired by his contemplation of woman's inconstant nature*) Sit down. (*He returns to his chair, doffs his hat, and resumes his former attitude of perfect ease. Portia closes the inner door*) Because you are the children's father, and for their sakes, I won't have it on my conscience that I turned you out when you were in need. (*He makes no answer, but pulls away at his pipe, as if quite detached from the situation. Portia paces the*

floor, cudgelling her wits and occasionally stopping and looking at Hiram) You could do well for yourself anywhere if you *would.* (*She resumes her restless walk; suddenly she stops and whirls on him; a wry smile playing on her face, she comes over to the table and stands facing him*) I 'll tell you what I 'll do, and it 's all I *will* do. I intended getting some help here. You were always cleverer in the kitchen than I . . .

HIRAM

You mean?

PORTIA

I 'll board and lodge you, give you Thursday afternoons off, and pay you twelve dollars a month to do my general housework. (*There is a pause, as he is somewhat aghast*) Take it or leave it. (*She is conscious of having done all that is required of her and experiences a sense of relief. At first he is rather indignant, but as he cons the matter over, his features relax into a smile of delicate amusement*) Well, what do you say?

HIRAM (*rises with easy deliberation, picks up the napkin from his place at the table, throws it over his arm, and assumes a professional attitude*) Shall I do the dishes now, mum?

PORTIA (*blinking*)

Do . . . do you mean . . . that . . . that you 'll accept?

HIRAM (*with a bow*)

Oui, Madame.

PORTIA

Good Lord!

HIRAM

I think I mentioned a few moments ago the indescribable charm of experiencing the unexpected. The vista that your unique proposal opens to me is pregnant with possibilities. I was on the point of becoming blasé. My jaded faculties are alert once more.

PORTIA

Are you in earnest?

HIRAM

As much so as yourself. Exit philosopher, enter factotum. (*Makes a move to clear the table*)

PORTIA (*half terrified at his acceptance and the situation she has created*) Stop! You . . . your duties won't begin until to-morrow.

HIRAM (*throws the napkin on the table, pulls out his pipe, and resumes his former comfortable position in the chair*) Madame, I am obliged.

PORTIA (*confronting him*)

Surely . . . surely you are not in earnest?

HIRAM

As much so as yourself.

PORTIA

You don't mean that you will stay here under these conditions?

HIRAM

Why not, if you will keep your part of the contract?

PORTIA (*half distracted*)

But Lucille! . . . Girlie! . . . (*She paces the floor, thinking over the many angles of the situation; suddenly she comes to a stop*) What name could I call you by? Not Hiram, of course.

HIRAM

No, I shall be pleased to discard Hiram, which means "well-born," and is therefore too satirical to be agreeable. (*With exquisite delight in the circumstances of the moment*) Let me see . . . suppose we select Horatius, Latin, signifies "Waste." For economy's sake, we 'll not have Horatius. What do you say to Ichabod, Hebrew, meaning "inglorious"? Inglorious is good. (*Warmly*) Or best of all, Nabal, also Hebrew, meaning "fool." Nabal it is, Madame, at your service. (*Bows*)

PORTIA

Nonsense!

HIRAM

Nabal, and no other name will I answer to . . . begging your pardon.

PORTIA

There is something terrible in all this.

HIRAM

Why should it be a tragic thing to engage a servant?

PORTIA

It is terrible that such a bargain should be struck between you and me.

HIRAM

The proposition came from you.

PORTIA

I never dreamed that you would accept it.

HIRAM

I suspected as much. (*Makes a move toward his hat*) If you wish to withdraw it . . .

PORTIA

No . . . no, I 'll stand by it. (*She goes to the*

lamp-stand and lights a candle) Take this candle and go to the last room on the left of the hall upstairs.

HIRAM (*going over to her and getting the candle, after which she goes up to the window and throws up the shade of the one overlooking the street, as if feeling the need of air; the moonlight pours through the window*) I 'll gird myself with sleep and prepare for an internecine strife with the local butcher. . . . Tomorrow the barriers dividing the employer and the employee will be raised . . . as they should be. (*He starts up the stairs. On reaching the turn he stops and contemplates Portia for a moment, as she stands in the window with her back to him. He leans over the railing and shades his candle with his hand, the flickering light illumining his face*) Just now I am reminded of Thackeray, where he says: "You and I are a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow islands more or less near to us." . . . Whatever comes of the situation, I shall credit you with originality, daring . . . yes . . . and a humane impulse too. You see, I am appreciative if not deserving. (*She makes no sign*) Bonsoir, Madame. (*Continues up the stairs*)

PORTIA

Good night.

PRESTON (*from the street, as he is passing*)

Is that you, Portia?

PORTIA (*hesitating*)

Yes.

PRESTON

Good night.

PORTIA

Good night, Rome.

[*Hiram catches the feeling in the voices and, smiling significantly, goes on down the passage.*

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

PERSONS

Portia Perkins
Lucille Perkins
Mary Jane Perkins
Hiram Perkins
Ivy Wilcox
Miss Faxon
Rome Preston
Barrett Sheridan
Joel Skinner
Star Skinner
Claud Whitcomb
Eugene Merryfield
Lewellyn Green
John Whipple
The Band
The Sons and Daughters of Freedom
The Street Crowd

THE SECOND ACT

Three weeks have passed. It is a typical late September forenoon in southern Indiana, where the summer passes very reluctantly. The scene discloses the shop of "Perkins the Printer" and is an old store with double doors and windows looking out upon the Court House Square, with its rows of trees and hitching-posts. The dull-colored walls of the shop are cracked and scarred, but somewhat enlivened by samples of job printing and posters, flamboyantly setting forth the particulars of railroad excursions, auction sales, county fairs, etc.

The right side of the floor space is given over to the executive staff. Near the window is a large modern press such as is used commonly for "patent-inside" country newspapers and job printing; for power it is connected with a small explosion engine. Against the wall is the distributing shelf, a sink where the type is washed, tables covered with stock of paper and cardboard, a cutting machine, etc. Down the right and into the room is a small Gordon foot-power press. Standing in the centre and right is the compositor's case, and behind and before it a high stool. Several old wooden chairs are distributed about the room.

The left side is plainly devoted to the editorial department, and the neat appearance of the railed-off portion in the foreground indicates the presence and

habits of a woman. The flat-topped desk in the angle of the rail is in perfect order, and a vase of fresh flowers stands on one corner. An attractive screen at right angles with the wall protects from the view of passers-by a well-kept washstand and towel rack. On the lower wall is a table containing letter files, books of reference, pasteboard boxes containing samples of cards, etc. Running up to the door and continuing from the railing is a wooden counter, back of which stands an old-fashioned, abandoned flywheel press covered with litter. Back of the press and against the wall are rows of shelves containing cans of ink, piles of papers, stacks of cardboard, old rollers, bundles of clean waste and all the accumulation incidental to a printing office. In the windows and on the shelves and tables are pumpkins, squashes, turnips, apples, etc., of large proportions, as well as other specimens of agriculture and horticulture that have been brought in by the rural subscribers to incite editorial comment and praise.

In front of the shop is a crowd of men, women, and children, facing the road and cheering as they thrill to the vigorous strains of a brass band. The music makes up in tempo and volume what it lacks in harmony. An illuminated sign borne in front of the band informs the spectators that "The Talented Young Romantic Star, Barrett Sheridan, Will Delight the Patrons that Evening at the Opera House in his World-Renowned Success 'The Outlaw.'" Some distance behind the band, as a separate pageant, but keeping step with the music, trudge about fifty of Gosport's male and female citizens. They are dressed in their best, plus gold-laced and plumed cocked hats, sashes of the national colors across their shoulders, and in their

hands long wands decorated with huge bows of red, white, and blue ribbon. A man in a frock-coat of ancient design carries a silken standard on which is emblazoned in gold "United Order of the Sons and Daughters of Freedom." The bearing and facial expression of the Daughters is even more galvanized than that of the Sons in the effort to be dignified and "keep step." The crowd cheers the United Order good-naturedly, although it is by no means such a stirring novelty as Barrett Sheridan's band. Not far behind the Sons and Daughters of Freedom rolls a rusty old hack drawn by two horses wearing white muslin banners on their sides. The cloth is lettered in red and black and urges the enfranchised onlooker to "Vote for Joel Skinner" and to "Come to the Grand Rally at Crippen's Hall To-night." Standing in the hack, bowing and lifting a silk hat that has served the owner at funerals and weddings for fifteen years, is Joel Skinner himself, wearing an expression intended to be benign, but which, having become strained and rigid from continued efforts, might now be easily mistaken for an outward and visible sign of an inward and physical distress.

There is a young man, Eugene Merryfield, looking over copy in front of the editor's desk. He is of no particular type, but is individualized by the sign of his trade, the dingy, capable fingers of a typesetter. He is without coat or collar; his sleeves are rolled above his elbows; his face is dirty and his hair rumpled. Eugene is the foreman of the shop, and as such takes his duties seriously. He is equally conscientious in his relations with the staff, viz., Mrs. Perkins, and in his attitude toward Lewellyn Green, who at the age of fifteen sustains the combined responsibilities of assis-

tant foreman, type distributor, mailing clerk, printer's devil, and office boy.

Lewellyn is standing on a chair in the door looking at the triple parade over the heads of the crowd. He also is coatless and collarless, with a smudgy face and inky hands and arms.

LEWELLYN

Come on, Gene, and look. The Sons and Daughters of Freedom is follerin' the show band.

EUGENE

We ain't got no time to look at a parade; we got to git this work out.

[*He takes a pile of handbills off the press and puts them on a table at the right. Lewellyn cheers the Sons and Daughters with the crowd and joins in the cries hailing Skinner. Some cheer Skinner, others jeer. One voice shouts: "Hooray for Preston," and several cheer. When Skinner's hack has passed, the crowd straggles along after the procession, and the sound of the band and the cheering die away in the distance.*

LEWELLYN (*coming down to the Gordon press and running off some business cards*) Say, don't that beat all? The Sons and Daughters of Freedom marching, and old Skinner taggin' after 'em all.

EUGENE (*going to case, taking a stick, and beginning to set type from copy on the hook*) All takin' advantage of there bein' a band in town.

LEWELLYN

I 'll bet it made the manager of the show good and mad.

[*Ivy Wilcox enters, dressed in the semi-barbaric fashion of the village belle whose taste has full sway. Her millinery, jewellery, furbelows, and temperament are all agitated by the music. Her hair curlers have resulted in a huge wave drawn over an abnormally high pompadour which lifts her hat into a perpendicular position. She carries a fan, a handbag, and a gayly colored parasol. She breezes down to the corner of the case as if giving Eugene a treat.*

IVY

Hello, Gene!

EUGENE (*sensible that it is a treat to talk to such a "hummer"*) Hello, Ivy! (*He comes around to the front of the case and leans his arm on it, endeavoring to make himself attractive to Ivy*)

IVY

Was n't that band jest elegant?

EUGENE

First class.

IVY

I 'm so passionately fond of music that I jest can't keep my feet still whenever I hear a band. (*They begin flirting with their eyes*) Comin' to the entertainment at the Baptist Church next Monday?

EUGENE

I dunno. You goin'?

IVY

Well, I guess so! I 'm goin' to give three recitations; one in costoom.

EUGENE

What you goin' to be?

IVY

The Goddess of Liberty. My dress is goin' to be

made out of flags and I 'm goin' to wear a cornicopy on my head.

EUGENE (*genuinely impressed*)

Say, that ought to be fine.

IVY

Don't tell anybody about the costoom. It 's goin' to be a surprise. I 'm goin' to recite the " Charge of the Light Brigade."

EUGENE (*familiarly fingering her handbag*)

What 'll you give me to go?

IVY (*with a suppressed giggle*)

If a certain party ain't there, I 'll give you leave to buy me ice cream to the refreshments.

EUGENE (*realizing that he has a rival*)

Is that all?

IVY

Well, if you 'd rather take me home after the . . . (*Catches sight of Lewellyn over Gene's shoulder. The boy, who has been feeding the card press, has become interested in the conversation and has come up behind Gene, absorbed in their talk*) Little pitchers have big ears!

EUGENE (*turning to rebuke him*)

Say, Lewellyn, you just tend to your knittin'.

IVY (*crossing over to the left centre, Eugene following*)

I jest stepped in to leave word about a party I 'm goin' to have to-morrow night.

EUGENE

I 'll tell Mrs. Perkins to put it in the paper. I guess she 's stepped out to look at the parade.

IVY

Say, ain't it awful the way she 's gittin' talked about?

EUGENE (*with a frown*)

Do you mean . . . about . . . about the hired man?

IVY

Yeh-ah. We 're jest pestered to death with folks runnin' to our house.

EUGENE

To your house? What for?

IVY

'Cause they know that bein' next door we can see and hear everything that 's goin' on.

EUGENE (*angrily*)

Oh!

IVY (*thoroughly enjoying herself*)

The queerest thing happened yesterday. He . . . Nabal they call him . . . ain't that the outlandishest name? Well, he was makin' some kind of a mess for supper. We can see right into their kitchen from our spare room . . . and Maw and me was watchin' him put in onions and tomatoes and green peppers into some of the awfullest lookin' things you ever saw.

EUGENE

What was it?

IVY

I dunno; it looked like a lot of bleached angleworms to me.

EUGENE

Good Lord!

IVY

Then, as we stood there lookin', he came straight over to our window with the disgustin' stuff and handed Maw a bowl of it.

EUGENE

What for?

IVY

He said that we had taken such an interest in the preparation of it, he 'd be glad to know if it met with our approval.

EUGENE

Why, the darned cuss!

IVY

No wonder folks is talkin'. . . . (*Eugene is distressed by her revelations, but Ivy is full of her own concerns and does not observe it*) Oh, Gene, don't say I told you, but the Baptist Church is goin' to take it up.

[*Star Skinner enters from the street.*

STAR

Hello, Ivy!

IVY (*immediately forgetting Eugene's presence and greeting Star with a beaming smile*) Hello, Star!

[*Offended at Ivy's sudden defection, Eugene goes back to his case and resumes his typesetting.*

STAR

Lucille ain't here, is she?

IVY (*realizing that he is not pursuing her*)

Don't look like it.

STAR (*bitterly moody*)

I suppose now that play actor 's in town she won't have no time for anybody else.

IVY

Most likely she wunt.

STAR (*after a pause, desperately*)

Say, Ivy, will you go to the show with me to-night?

IVY (*suddenly coy*)

Why, ain't you goin' to your Paw's meetin'?

STAR

Shoot . . . no! I 'm goin' to that darned show and see if Lucille is there.

IVY (*tempestuously*)

Star Skinner, you ain't askin' me to play second fiddle, are you?

STAR (*rising to the situation diplomatically*)

Why no, Ivy. . . . I like you . . . you know that.

IVY

I ain't never noticed it much when Lucille Perkins was around.

STAR (*ready to end negotiations*)

All right! (*He starts for the door*)

IVY (*taking fright*)

Oh, Star, wait a minute . . . (*In a sugary tone*) I was n't exactly refusin', and I wanted to ask you about my party to-morrow night. Ain't you comin'?

STAR

Oh, I guess so.

EUGENE (*incensed at Star because of Ivy's fickleness*)

Say, Star, I guess your old man 'd be pretty hot if he saw you in here.

STAR (*standing beside Ivy*)

Oh, he knows I ain't interested in his and Mis' Perkins' fight.

[*Hiram, clean shaven, wearing a white linen suit and straw hat, with a market basket on his arm, enters and comes leisurely forward directly behind them. Lewellyn is the only one present who observes him.*

IVY (*with gusto*)

Well, it looks to me like the pot callin' the kettle black since she 's took a man into her kitchen.

HIRAM (*sweetly to Ivy*)

You don't approve, I take it.

[*Ivy falls back with a frightened squeal, staring at him as if at an apparition. Star is startled, but holds his ground. He and Eugene glare disapprovingly at Hiram. There is an embarrassing pause. Eugene takes refuge in his work. Lewellyn, who has seen the situation, laughs explosively. The others frown at him.*

HIRAM

Ah, my young friend, you have a sense of humor, I see. (*Another deadly pause; Hiram looks pleasantly from one to another*) I hope I did n't interrupt a conversation.

STAR (*fidgeting nervously and taking refuge in blustering*) See here . . . Mr. . . . er . . . a . . . whatever your fool name is . . .

HIRAM

Quite correct; it *is* a fool name.

STAR (*not catching the drift, but determined to put him down*) See here, I don't feel like . . .

HIRAM

Well, if you don't feel like it, don't do it.

STAR (*makes a desperate effort to think of something that will overwhelm Hiram; can't think of it, and so resorts to a dignified exit; gets nearly to the door, turns to fire a parting shot*) You . . . you . . . (*floundering*) you think you 're smart, don't you? Come on, Ivy. (*Goes quickly outside on*

the walk and waits there, having beckoned Ivy to follow)

HIRAM (*turning with a gentle smile of enjoyment to Ivy*) Ah, Ivy . . . the clinging vine.

IVY (*glaring at him*)

Miss Wilcox is my name . . . Miss Ivy Wilcox. (*Flounces up to the door and joins Star*)

HIRAM

Thank you very much.

EUGENE (*does not relish being deserted thus by the other two, and is also visibly jealous as Star and Ivy go off down the street together*) Say, Ivy, you said that . . .

HIRAM (*sees the situation and catches Eugene's jealous expression*) Ah, and thou too, Brutus?

EUGENE (*irritably*)

My name is Merryfield . . . Eugene Merryfield.

HIRAM

I see; with the accent on the "Merry." (*Lewellyn snickers*) Ah, our young friend with the sense of humor. Come here, Mark Twain.

LEWELLYN (*immediately sobered and resentful*)

My name 's Green. Lewellyn Green 's my name.

HIRAM

Very appropriate, I 'm sure. But you are all mistaken. I am not the directory man. (*His eye rests on Eugene's right hand as he picks and sets the type with angry emphasis*)

EUGENE (*glaring*)

Oh, we know who you are.

HIRAM

That is very pleasant. I may feel, then, that you take an interest in me, as it were?

EUGENE

Say, look here, you . . .

HIRAM

Pardon me, but you are spelling a word incorrectly; there are only two p's in "grapple."

EUGENE

What?

HIRAM

You 've got three.

EUGENE

Who 's stickin' this type?

HIRAM

You are, and you 're sticking it wrong.

EUGENE

Look here . . .

HIRAM (*his nerves really on edge*)

Please, only two p's, to oblige me. (*Eugene throws the offending piece of type in the case violently*) Thank you.

[*Barrett Sheridan enters briskly from the street.*

SHERIDAN (*to Eugene*)

Are those "To-night" dodgers ready?

LEWELLYN (*officiously, before Eugene can answer*)

Yes, sir, here they be.

[*He grabs the pile of handbills off the table and runs to Sheridan with them. Hiram saunters over to the desk at the left and watches Sheridan unobserved.*

SHERIDAN (*reading the bill on top of the pile*)

"Opera House To-night. The Young Romantic Actor Barrett Sheridan in his New York Success, THE OUTLAW," and so on . . . "Set of parlor furniture given away Saturday night." Yes, that will do. They should have been done this morning.

EUGENE (*importantly*)

This is our busy day; we 're goin' to press.

LEWELLYN (*not stirring from Sheridan's elbow*)

Say, Mr. Sheridan, do you want any props got?

SHERIDAN (*smiling understandingly*)

A few, I guess.

LEWELLYN

I 'll get 'em from our house if you 'll give me a free pass.

SHERIDAN

All right, sonny; come up to the theatre after you get your supper. (*Turns to go, sees Hiram, and there is a mutual recognition*) Why . . . Evans . . . you dear old ink slinger! (*They shake hands*)

HIRAM (*pleasantly*)

And you, J. B. Tillottson, Junior, joy of the publishing firm of . . .

SHERIDAN (*quickly interrupting and handing him a dodger off the pile*) Barrett Sheridan, at your service.

HIRAM (*glancing over handbill*)

Oh, you are the rising young American star?

SHERIDAN

I am that luminary.

HIRAM

And you are illuminating Gosport to-night?

SHERIDAN (*half laughing*)

Yes.

HIRAM

How have the mighty fallen!

SHERIDAN

Oh, you need n't look at it that way. The fact is, I can't see the newspaper business and never could.

The governor wants me to go into the financial part of the paper, but I simply can't see it, that 's all.

HIRAM

So you are devoting yourself to art and giving away a set of parlor furniture every Saturday night.

SHERIDAN

I 'm barnstorming, but I 'm happy. I 'd rather act than be the biggest editor in the United States.

HIRAM

Well, you 'd better get it all out of your system. Is your show as bad as your band?

SHERIDAN

You come to-night and see for yourself. . . . But how about yourself, Evans? You lit out in a hurry. You almost broke the governor's heart when you did n't finish your book. What made you quit so suddenly?

HIRAM (*slowly, with a far-away look*)

The old malady . . . the wanderlust.

SHERIDAN

The governor said if you 'd stick to it, your book would have been a best seller for sure.

HIRAM

I am finishing it now.

SHERIDAN

Great! Make good this time, old man, for your own sake. Are you doing anything here?

HIRAM (*smiling whimsically*)

Yes.

SHERIDAN (*incredulously*)

Here?

HIRAM

Yes.

SHERIDAN

For Perkins the Printer?

HIRAM

Yes.

SHERIDAN

What is it?

HIRAM

I 'm conducting the Household Hints department.

SHERIDAN

No! That 's great! (*With sudden energy*) Well, I must get my actors at this billing or I won't play to my light bills to-night. So long! (*Starts off, turns at door, and speaks to Eugene*) Tell Mrs. Perkins that I 'll be back in a little while to pay for these dodgers.

[*Sheridan goes out and for a moment is seen passing the bills to occasional passers-by.*

Hiram stands in smiling meditation, as if musing on his conversation with Sheridan. Lewellyn observes his smile and crosses over to him.

LEWELLYN (*confidentially*)

Did he give you a free pass?

HIRAM (*rousing himself*)

No . . . you see, I did n't offer to run props.

LEWELLYN

Say, he 's a great actor. I seen him play the " Merchant of Venus."

HIRAM

Who?

LEWELLYN

I seen him play the " Merchant of Venus " with false whiskers.

HIRAM

Shades of the Immortal Bard! (*He picks up a magazine from the counter and catches Eugene's sullen, watchful eye*) Is this the last "Review"?

EUGENE

Yes.

HIRAM

Have I your permission to look it over?

EUGENE

I ain't goin' to hinder you.

HIRAM

For this relief much thanks. (*He goes up to the chair beside the large press at the back and near the right wall; sits and reads the magazine, quite serene under Eugene's inhospitality*)

EUGENE (*growls at him inarticulately*)

Lewellyn, hand me that list of delegates on Mis' Perkinses desk.

LEWELLYN (*obeying orders*)

Gee, the hotel is awful crowded.

EUGENE

Guess those show folks will have to put up at the boarding-house.

[*Portia comes down the street from the right dressed in a different gown but with the same hat as in the first act. As she gets to the door of her office, Claud Whitcomb, looking just as in the previous act, saunters up from the left, greets her with a nod, and passes on. Portia stops in the office door and calls out to him.*

PORTIA

Hello, Claud!

CLAUD

Howdy do, Mis' Perkins?

PORTIA

See here, Claud Whitcomb, I want to speak to you.

CLAUD (*stopping reluctantly*)

I 'm jest goin' down to the deepo to see the . . .

PORTIA

No, you don't. You just walk right in here. (*She comes down briskly, enters the railing, takes off her hat, and hangs it on a nail in the wall*)

CLAUD (*coming into the office*)

I 'd hate to miss the two-fourteen freight.

PORTIA

I 'm sorry to interfere with your dissipations, Claud, but I want to ask if you don't think it 's time that you or your father paid something for the "Clarion"? You 're a year and a half behind.

CLAUD (*coming down in front of her desk*)

Say, I ben thinkin' about that.

PORTIA

I 'm glad you got as far as thinking about it. (*She seats herself at the desk and begins busily to arrange her writing material*)

CLAUD

I was thinkin' that mebbe you 'd like that brindle bull pup that we . . .

PORTIA (*leaning back in her chair suddenly*)

Bull pup! Will you tell me if there 's any law in this state against paying your subscriptions in *money?*

CLAUD

Why, I dunno.

PORTIA

People have given me puppies, kittens, and canaries enough to start a menagerie. . . . I 've taken everything, from house plants and apples to wristlets and bead baskets.

CLAUD

Well, great Jehosophat, I never heard tell of payin' fer a paper with money.

PORTIA (*her temper rising*)

You get money for your wood, don't you?

CLAUD

Yes, but that 's business.

PORTIA

Well, what do you call this?

CLAUD (*astonished at the question*)

Why, you would n't call runnin' a newspaper *reg*'lar business, would you?

PORTIA

I certainly would, and you just hustle the money along for your paper as fast as ever you can. (*She begins to write*)

CLAUD (*thoroughly upset by such unheard of proceedings*) Well, by Jinks, I . . . ((*His voice dies away as he saunters up to the door, where he stops to think a moment and then turns, facing Portia*) Oh say, how are you sellin' callin' cards?

PORTIA (*without looking up*)

Depends upon what kind you want.

CLAUD (*very earnest and coming down in front of her desk again*) Well, Dave Hanchett 's got some purty ones that has a dove holdin' a ribbon in its bill, that 's got his name printed on it.

PORTIA (*with forced patience getting a box of sample cards off the counter and putting it on the front of her desk for Claud to look over*) Don't know that we can furnish you with the dove. What 's the matter with plain white cards?

CLAUD (*examining samples*)

Don't seem to be no snap to 'em with nothin' but the name on 'em. (*Selects one*) By Jinks, here 's a purty one, with a bunch of forgit-me-nots! Say, them would be cute. How much be they?

PORTIA (*without looking up*)

Oh, sixty cents a hundred.

CLAUD

Gosh, I don't want a hundred.

PORTIA (*looking up*)

How many do you want?

CLAUD

Now, let 's see . . . (*half audibly to himself counts off on his fingers*) Sary, Alviry, Jenny, Stell, Maudy . . . (*To Portia*) Oh, 'bout eleven, I guess.

PORTIA

Can't set up the name for less than fifty cents.

CLAUD (*emits a low whistle*)

Whew! Well, I swan! . . . I got a new white vest, and I thought I 'd make some New Year's calls this year; but I guess I 'll have to give it up. (*Starts for the door*)

PORTIA

New Year's calls? . . . Why, what 's your rush now?

CLAUD

I thought sein' as it 's dull season fer New Year's cards you might sell 'em cheaper.

PORTIA (*grabbing up a book from her desk and threatening to throw it at him*) Go on away! Get out of here! Get on down to the depot.

[*Claud saunters off down the street to the right.*

EUGENE

That Claud Whitcomb's enough to hector the life out of anybody.

PORTIA (*writing*)

Anyone been here to see me?

EUGENE

No, but I met Skinner at the post office and he wanted to know if we was goin' to print another attack on him to-day.

PORTIA

I hope you told him we were.

EUGENE

I did.

PORTIA

What did he say?

EUGENE (*seriously*)

You bein' a woman, 'tain't fit fer you to hear.

PORTIA (*smiles to herself with satisfaction; there is a pause*) You 're setting up the story now, are n't you?

EUGENE

Yes.

PORTIA

Lewellyn!

LEWELLYN (*looking up from his press*)

Yes, ma'am!

PORTIA

Go over to Blanchard's livery barn and tell them to

hitch up a rig for me. . . . Single buggy. I 'm going to drive over to the factory and see Jenny Miller.

[*Lewellyn gets his hat from the counter and leaves on the run. During the progress of the act, village characters pass and repass, shopping and gossiping, along the street. Barrett Sheridan and Lucille now meet in front of the office, and are immediately oblivious to everything but each other. Sheridan's manner is unmistakably devoted.*

EUGENE (*apropos of the Skinner matter and still setting up the story*) This is Convention day, and Skinner will stop at nothing. You 'll git yourself into . . .

PORTIA (*in a sharp tone, but still good-naturedly*) That will do, Gene. Are you on salary or are you just working for wages? If it 's the latter, why you 'd better keep quiet. I 'll be very — (*turning toward the street as she speaks, her voice dies away at sight of Lucille and Sheridan; she rises to her feet, stares out at them for a moment, and then calls*) Lucille! . . . (*Lucille affects not to hear her. Portia's voice grows more stern*) Lucille! (*Lucille, discomfited, turns*) Lucille, I want to speak to you.

[*The girl, flushed and annoyed at being summoned in this way, enters. Sheridan follows her after a moment's hesitation outside.*

LUCILLE

Oh, mother, why *will* you . . .

PORTIA (*silencing her with a look*)

Gene, have you got that set up yet?

EUGENE

Yes.

PORTIA

Then I wish you 'd step around to Dr. Lovejoy's and see if he thinks Mrs. Tanner's twins are going to live. The readers would like to know.

[*Gene gets his hat from the table at the right, and with a comprehensive look at Sheridan goes out into the street and disappears to the left.*

LUCILLE (*almost in tears*)

I think it 's a shame the way you call me in, mother, just as if I were a child.

PORTIA

That 's all you are.

SHERIDAN (*hat in hand, makes an attempt to explain*)

Excuse me, Mrs. Perkins, but if you will allow me . . .

PORTIA

In a minute, sir, I 'll talk to you. (*She picks up a book from her desk and gives it to Lucille*) Lucille, take this book over to the minister's wife, will you?

LUCILLE

Oh, mother, I . . .

PORTIA

That 's a good girl. It may help her to forget she *is* a minister's wife.

[*Lucille, very ungraciously, takes the book and flounces out and down the street, exchanging a significant look with Sheridan on the way, which Portia observes.*

SHERIDAN (*coming down to the desk and assuming a business-like tone*) Pardon me, Mrs. Perkins, but I— (*She meets his look steadily, sitting back in her chair, and his words die away; suddenly he digs down in his pocket and brings up three silver dollars*)

I want to pay for those dodgers. Three dollars, is n't it?

PORTIA (*dropping the money into a desk drawer*)
Yes, that 's right. Do you want a receipted bill?

SHERIDAN
No, it is n't necessary. (*There is a pause, and he finally blurts out*) Er . . . ah . . . er . . . what 's the matter with me anyway, Mrs. Perkins?

PORTIA (*looking him over with a steady, whimsical expression, amused in spite of herself at his painful sincerity*) You look sound, and as if you 'd stand without hitching.

SHERIDAN
Oh, you don't understand. I mean . . .

PORTIA (*with sudden and deep earnestness*)
Well, young man, what *do* you mean?

SHERIDAN
I 've tried every way to make you like me.

PORTIA
I thought you had tried every way to make my *daughter* like you.

SHERIDAN
Why, I . . .

PORTIA
It was an easy task, I 'm afraid.

SHERIDAN
Oh, now I . . .

PORTIA
Just take a seat, please.

SHERIDAN (*thankful for this courtesy, takes a chair from above and places it before her desk, speaking very eagerly*) Thank you. I 've wanted to have a talk with you for some time. It 's been difficult, be-

cause whenever I 've been in town here, you have been . . . that is, you were . . . ah . . . er . . . why . . .

PORTIA

Antagonistic?

SHERIDAN

Well, yes. I thought so.

PORTIA

You thought rightly. I am.

SHERIDAN

But won't you tell me why? Of course I know; you think I 'm an actor and . . .

PORTIA

Oh, no, I don't; I 've seen you play.

SHERIDAN (*half laughing, half nettled*)

Oh now, Mrs. Perkins, that 's cruel!

PORTIA

Perhaps, and considering that you get your dodgers printed here, it 's even ungrateful. But it 's no kindness for anyone to encourage you to act.

SHERIDAN

Is *that* your objection to me?

PORTIA (*deliberately and as if turning it over in her mind*) No, I 'm not sure that it is n't in your favor. (*Leaning forward and growing very serious*) Now, I 'm going to be very plain with you. Why have you tried to attract my daughter?

SHERIDAN (*genuinely*)

Because I think her the most charming girl I 've ever met!

PORTIA

So you had to come to this town to find a charming girl? You 're a city man, I think.

SHERIDAN (*with enthusiasm*)

Yes, and all the more reason why I appreciate Lucille's simplicity.

PORTIA (*her voice deep and thrilling*)

Do you *love* her?

SHERIDAN

I do, Mrs. Perkins, and I knew it the very first time I met her.

PORTIA

Well, admitting that you are convinced of your own sincerity, don't you think it pretty nervy of a young fellow, barnstorming around as you are, to offer your attentions and expect to be taken seriously?

SHERIDAN

Why, I . . .

PORTIA

Please wait a moment. You see, we don't really know you. You come to our little town, turn all the silly girls' heads, and then pass on, and, I suppose, repeat your triumphs in the very next place you visit.

SHERIDAN (*with hurt pride*)

Oh, Mrs. Perkins . . .

PORTIA (*her business-like manner is gone; she is just an anxious mother*) We don't know anything about you, you see. My little girl is poor . . . poor, and cursed with ambition. You represent to her the world that she is so anxious to see. Oh, she *thinks* she loves you, I know that. You see, I've been through the same thing. At her age I did much the same sort of thing that Lucille is ready to do now. . . . I'm saying this in confidence, Mr. Sheridan, but I married a man who . . .

HIRAM (*rising from his chair and coming forward*)
Did I understand you to say that there was fresh fish in the market to-day?

[*It is plain that he has interrupted to prevent eavesdropping any further. His face is rather subdued in expression, as if he knew what Portia was about to say. Sheridan is surprised, and Portia aghast, as he stands politely waiting for orders with his basket on one arm and his hat in his other hand.*

PORTIA (*rising*)
You . . . I did not . . .

HIRAM (*in a matter-of-fact tone, breaking in to give her a chance to recover herself*) You did not give the order, but I thought that fish might appeal, as it is Friday and "custom hath made it a property of easiness" to stand it once a week.

PORTIA
Why, I . . .

HIRAM (*with a bow and sweep of his hat*)
I 'm sure I 'm *de trop*, and with your permission, ma'am, I 'll order the dinner.

[*He goes out and disappears up the street to the left. Portia and Sheridan are dumfounded for a moment.*

SHERIDAN (*in a maze over Hiram's remarks and attitude*) Is he . . .

PORTIA (*confused, but pulling herself together*)
My . . . my . . . hired man. . . . (*She prevents Sheridan's expressions of surprise and questionings, and his mind flies back promptly to his own affairs*) Just one word more, Mr. Sheridan. I will not let Lucille marry a man who has no assured position in life, and I will not listen to her putting a yoke

around her neck before she is old enough to know what she is doing. I 've known too much poverty and disappointment to let one of my girls invite it without fighting to save her from herself.

SHERIDAN

But I . . .

PORTIA (*sternly*)

Keep away from my girl, Mr. Sheridan! Give her a chance to get her senses back.

SHERIDAN (*standing, facing her, and speaking quietly and firmly*) I appreciate your candor, Mrs. Perkins, and I 've no doubt you think you are acting wisely. I 'm going to be candid with *you*, and tell you that all you have said does n't change my feelings or determination one bit.

PORTIA

Yes, but . . .

SHERIDAN

Pardon me, I 'm not going to argue with you. I see you 've got the usual prejudice against the actor. But I want you to know that I 'm no lady killer, and I 'm not so unreliable and shallow as you seem to think. I 'm sorry if you 've been unhappy, but because your marriage turned out badly, you 've no right to put every man under suspicion whom you have n't known since his baptism.

PORTIA

Mr. Sheridan!

SHERIDAN (*carried away by his own viewpoint*)

Mrs. Perkins, I want to marry your daughter. I love her and I believe she loves me. I 'm sure that I can take care of her. I 'm going to do my best to

get her, so right here I give you fair warning. Good day.

[*He bows curtly and strides out of the office and down the street to the right. Portia is half stunned by his vehemence and stands looking after him a moment with a slow smile gradually breaking over her face. Lewellyn drives up a horse and small open buggy and pulls up in front of the shop.*

LEWELLYN

Whoa! All right, Mis' Perkins!

[*He jumps down from the buggy and holds the horse by the bit. Rome Preston enters as if on an important mission.*

PORTIA (*getting her hat and putting it on*)

Yes, I 'm coming.

PRESTON

Good afternoon, Portia!

PORTIA

Glad to see you! What 's your news? Something for us?

PRESTON (*very gravely*)

Are you determined to print that Miller story?

PORTIA

It 's all set up and will be in to-day's issue.

PRESTON

Skinner will retaliate.

PORTIA

Let him. Why, do you know he has had hundreds and hundreds of dollars' worth of produce off the Miller farm . . . old Mrs. Miller thinking it was taken as interest on the mortgage. Skinner had the best of everything that grew on the place, never

gave a receipt, and last spring foreclosed for five years' interest.

PRESTON

What a confiding dupe old Mrs. Miller was!

PORTIA

That will only make the voters all the more disgusted with Skinner. I 'm going up to the knitting factory now to get Jenny Miller's affidavit. Come along, I need a notary.

PRESTON

Well, hardly!

PORTIA (*starting up to the door with a laugh*)

All right, I 'll take old Dobbs then.

PRESTON (*detaining her with a gesture*)

I wish you would n't print this thing.

PORTIA

The people ought to know what Skinner is.

PRESTON (*earnestly*)

It is n't Skinner I 'm thinking of.

PORTIA

Who are you thinking of.

PRESTON (*gravely*)

You.

PORTIA

Me?

PRESTON

Yes.

PORTIA (*turning the situation over in her mind*)

He can use his influence with the bank, but he can't say anything against me.

PRESTON

A month ago he could n't, but since you 've taken that fellow to work for you . . .

PORTIA (*realizing his whole meaning*)

Oh! (*There is a pause as she ponders his words*) *You* never questioned my actions.

PRESTON

No, and yet . . .

PORTIA

And yet you don't approve?

PRESTON

It is, to say the least, unconventional.

PORTIA (*smiling*)

He 's a good cook.

PRESTON

Yes, but who is he?

PORTIA (*is about to tell him*)

He . . . he is . . . (*Changes her mind*) I 'll tell you after the nomination.

[*Eugene enters from the street, whistling.*

PORTIA

Now, Gene, set up those locals. (*Gets pad from the desk, tears off the top sheet, and hands it to him*) Set up whatever Linc Watkins brings in, too.

EUGENE

All right. Dr. Lovejoy says both the Tanner twins stood a good chance of livin' till they was baptized.

PORTIA

How 's that?

EUGENE

Mrs. Tanner named 'em Alphonso De Loss and Alonzo De Lacy.

PORTIA

Good!

EUGENE

Well, Alphonso De Loss is all right, but Alonzo De Lacy quit thrivin' the minnit he heard his name.

PORTIA

No wonder. (*Laughing*) Well, good-bye, Rome. I can't change my programme now. So long.

[*She goes out and gets into the buggy and drives off. Lewellyn furtively hitches on behind. Eugene puts the locals on the hook and sets them up.*

EUGENE

How do things look for your nomination, Mr. Preston?

PRESTON (*rousing himself from a perplexed reverie*)

I 'm not prophesying, Gene.

EUGENE

Just as well, I guess. You want to look out fer old Skinner. If spendin' money will do it, old money bags will git there.

[*Miss Faxon enters like a full-rigged ship in the paraphernalia of her Order, with cocked hat, sash, badge, and wand.*

EUGENE (*gasps as he catches sight of her*)

Holy smoke!

PRESTON (*surveying her with a smile as she takes up an effective position between Eugene and himself*) Well, Miss Faxon, your Order seems to be waking things up to-day. Oh, and you 're an officer, I see.

MISS FAXON (*with a stiffness befitting her dignity*)

Yes, sir, I 'm a Past Noble Grand.

PRESTON

Oh, indeed!

MISS FAXON

What did you think of our parade?

PRESTON

Very impressive, very.

MISS FAXON

Guess we stepped it off about as lively as them show folks did.

PRESTON

Undoubtedly!

MISS FAXON

Too bad you ain't a member of the Sons and Daughters of Freedom, Mr. Preston. It 's bound to tell against you in politics.

PRESTON (*assuming concern*)

Do you think so?

MISS FAXON

Jest as sure as you 're born.

[*A rickety little two-seated, covered conveyance known as the "bus" drives up, drawn by an old gray horse and driven by Linc Watkins. In the rear are two passengers with luggage. On the front seat beside Linc stands a small steamer trunk on end. Linc still wears the fur coat, but carries a palm-leaf fan.*

LINC

Whoa!

PRESTON (*continuing his defence to Miss Faxon*)

I 'll have to think about joining your Order.

MISS FAXON

Now you 're talkin'! (*Sees Linc, who has entered, dripping with perspiration and fanning himself vigorously*) Well, Linc Watkins, if it ain't enough to give a body sunstroke to look at you. What on airth are you wearin' that thing yet fer?

LINC

I 'm skeered to take it off now. It might throw me into lung fever. It 's takin' my fat off ten pound a week.

EUGENE (*working at his case*)

Figgerin' at that rate, Linc, by the time cold weather sets in, you 'll be purty nigh a fairy.

LINC

I got a postal from the owner sayin' he 'd be here in ten days and git his coat.

EUGENE

What 'll you do then?

LINC

I dunno, unless I taper off on my ulster.

PASSENGER IN BUS

See here, driver, are you going to make that train?

LINC (*signing him to be patient*)

You jest hold yer hosses. (*Turning to those in the shop*) Dunno but I got to give up bus drivin', or else quit my job on this here newspaper.

MISS FAXON

Well, I guess the quicker you give up writin' fer this here newspaper, the higher you 'll be thought of in Gosport.

[*Eugene and Preston are concerned immediately.*

LINC (*in a militant tone*)

Jest explain that last remark, will you, Miss Faxon?

MISS FAXON

It don't need much explainin'. I 'll jest say that, as a business woman, I came here to take my ad. out of the "Clarion."

EUGENE

What?

MISS FAXON (*with conscious heroism*)
And as a milliner, I take a firm stand against immorality.

PRESTON
What?

MISS FAXON (*volume and venom increasing*)
And as an officer of the Sons and Daughters of Freedom, I came to say that we 've blackballed her.

ALL THE MEN
What?

MISS FAXON (*in a raging fit of spite*)
Now it ain't no use your chippin' in, Rome Preston. Everybody knows how she 's fit fer you in the " Clarion," and naturally you ain't goin' to turn against her till election time 's over. (*With tremendous emphasis*) But let me tell you, there ain't no lone womern in this here town kin *keep a man hired girl.*

EUGENE (*the first to recover after a shocked silence*)
But look here, Miss Faxon, you . . .

MISS FAXON (*pounding with her wand to regain the floor*) You jest take that " *Re*fined Millinery " ad. right out, Gene Merryfield, and tell Mis' Perkins that she 's flew in the face of Providence and Gosport public opinion, and respectable people ain't goin' to countenance it . . . especially a Past Noble Grand. (*She sweeps in her proud consciousness of virtue up to the door, the three men dumfounded and following her with their eyes; at the door she turns again for a parting shot*) As fer *you*, Rome Preston, all I got to say is: Hooray fer *Skinner!* (*She marches off down the street*)

LINC
Don't that womern beat the Dutch?

PASSENGER (*starting to leave the bus with his bag and foot it to the depot*) Now look here, driver . . .

LINC (*rushing up, grabbing him, and thrusting him back in the bus, reassuring him roughly*) Here now, here, I 'll git you there in time. I 'm with you right now.

[*The passenger permits himself to be persuaded.*

LINC (*comes back to the door*)

Say, Gene, Miss Faxon knocked them items clean out of my head. . . . Oh yes! Melon thieves in Simpson's patch last night. Lige shot 'em full of rock salt. (*Eugene writes; Linc goes to his vehicle, and as his foot is on the wheel ready to mount, he recalls another vital piece of information*) The Five and Ten Cent Store is goin' to move next to the Barber Shop. (*Pulls himself up on his seat and gathers up the lines*) Here 's another! That dentist from Terre Haute is at the hotel fer a week and Clint Webb 's goin' to have a new upper set. Git ap.

[*He clucks to the horse, slaps it with the lines, and drives off.*

Preston has been thoughtfully considering the Miss Faxon episode and is very much disturbed by it. He crosses to Eugene at the case.

PRESTON

Gene, this is awful.

EUGENE

It 's too bad, but what can you say? The man is there. (*Hotly*) And say, do you know, he had the cheek to try and tell me how to set up copy.

PRESTON (*interested*)

He did?

EUGENE

Yes, *me!* What do you think of him?

PRESTON (*after a moment's thought*)

Gene, Mrs. Perkins must not print the Miller story.

EUGENE

There 's no use talkin' to her.

PRESTON (*looking meaningly into Gene's face*)

I know it . . . so I 'm talking to you.

EUGENE (*puzzled*)

Me?

PRESTON

Yes, Gene; that story must be taken out.

EUGENE

She 'd set it up herself.

PRESTON (*paces the floor for a moment; a thought strikes him and he goes up to the large press and looks at it as if trying to master its details*)

Could n't you remove a bolt or a screw or something that would destroy the connection between the engine and the press?

EUGENE (*reading his thought*)

By Gosh, you 've hit it.

PRESTON

That would leave the press without power and make it impossible to get the paper out to-day.

EUGENE

But see here, I can't do that. I 'd lose my job.

PRESTON

I 'll take the responsibility.

EUGENE (*tempted, but resisting*)

No . . . no . . . I won't do it. . . . I 've got the old folks dependin' on me. I ain't goin' to monkey with that press and git fired. No siree!

PRESTON

Will you do this? Will you get out of here for an hour?

EUGENE

Why . . . do you mean . . . ?

PRESTON

Never mind what I mean . . . will you go?

EUGENE (*with a wink of entire apprehension*)

Say . . . I 'm on. (*Gets his hat from the table and starts to go; as an after-thought he gets a wrench from the shelf and puts it on the form-table with an eloquent look and gesture*) Here 's the monkey wrench.

PRESTON (*trying to pick out the story on the form*)

Thanks.

EUGENE

Mr. Preston, this will cost you your nomination.

PRESTON

I know the cost, but it 's cheap at the price.

EUGENE

Gee, I hate to see you lose!

PRESTON (*unable to read the form*)

Gene, where is the Miller story?

EUGENE (*going over and laying his finger on it*)

In the form, here.

PRESTON

I want to upset it.

EUGENE (*with a smile at his ignorance of printer's terms*) Huh, pi it, you mean.

PRESTON

Do I?

EUGENE

Yes. (*Tipping him off*) Now that form ain't

locked. Pi it if you want to, but don't let me see you do it. (*He starts for the door*)

PRESTON (*detaining him*)

Here, Gene. (*Takes money from his pocket and offers him a bill*)

EUGENE (*very nearly offended*)

Keep yer money. It 's fer her good name. I could n't take money fer that.

[*He goes out. Preston closes the doors, then works with the monkey wrench until he has removed the starting-wheel, whereupon he looks about for a place to conceal it. Finally he hides it in the bag of waste paper and trimmings on the floor near the door. He drops the wrench on the floor by the press, goes down to the form-table, picks up the mallet lying on it, and pies a portion of the type, a lot of which falls to the floor. He crosses to Portia's desk to get his hat and is ready to leave when the doors open and Hiram, curious at finding the doors closed, enters with his basket on his arm. It is now filled with vegetables, etc. Hiram's eyes roam over the office, alighting on Preston; he is sensible of the unusual fact of his presence and the absence of the people attached to the office. Preston is annoyed at the interruption. The men face each other in silence for a moment, as if each were taking the other's measure. Preston is aggressive, cold, antagonistic, and somewhat superior. Hiram is calm, serene, and cynical.*

PRESTON

You are looking for . . .

HIRAM

An honest man . . . like our old friend Diogenes;

and if what the "Clarion" says of you is true, my search is ended. This is Mr. Preston, I believe.

PRESTON (*nettled at the other's use of personalities*)

That 's my name. I understand that you are . . .

HIRAM (*pointing to his basket of groceries, etc.*)

Behold the outward and visible sign of my guild. I am attached to the Perkins household.

PRESTON

I must say that you employ rather unusual language for a cook or butler, or whatever you style yourself.

HIRAM

A philosopher perhaps. I obey Joubert, who bids us "in the commerce of speech, use only coin of gold and silver."

PRESTON (*impatient at this exhibition of learning*)

Now see here, my man . . . (*Hiram's eyes light up in a way that immediately causes Preston to feel that the expression of patronage was somehow inappropriate; consequently he becomes rather conscious and a bit off his poise*) A . . . er . . . a . . . I don't know your name.

HIRAM (*with perfect serenity*)

It is of no consequence when one is a philosopher . . . and cooks.

PRESTON (*once more on the aggressive*)

It occurs to me as rather strange that a man of your seeming ability should hire out as a cook.

HIRAM (*returning his scrutiny with a look both mild and appraising*) Does it? It occurs to me as strange that a man of your *seeming* ability should hire out as a politician.

PRESTON (*feeling the sting*)

You mean . . .

HIRAM

That in the end we are both servants. I of an individual, you of a collection of individuals. I *may* serve my employer to her satisfaction; your task is not so easy.

PRESTON (*unconsciously defending himself*)

Not an easy task, perhaps, but necessary.

HIRAM

I perceive that you read your Virgil, and say with him: "The noblest motive is the public good."

PRESTON (*quite at a loss to know what to say or do*)

Very possible.

HIRAM (*enjoying himself thoroughly*)

In my position, my perquisites are the cheese parings and chicken wings . . . yours, a block of stock and the lobbyists' small change. My associates are the grocer, the butcher, and the fishman. . . . Yours, the lawyers, the politicians, and the corporations. Comparatively, the fishman looms large. . . . don't you think so?

PRESTON

I think you 're damned impertinent.

HIRAM (*with a slight apologetic bow*)

I beg your pardon. At times the philosopher quite submerges the cook.

PRESTON

Evidently.

HIRAM (*exhibiting the contents of his basket*)

Could I interest you in vegetables, and would you care to know that the hens are not laying well this week?

PRESTON (*losing his temper, but determined to carry his point*) I see that for some reason you are mak-

ing light of your position and mine, but you appear to be something of a man underneath all this nonsense, and it is to your manhood that I wish to appeal.

HIRAM

I am Burke's very definition: "Man is an animal that cooks his food."

PRESTON (*irritably*)

Just let up on your quotations, will you? And let me tell you that if you wish to do Mrs. Perkins a favor, you will leave Gosport.

HIRAM

Eh?

PRESTON

Mrs. Perkins is a widow; has no man to protect her.

HIRAM

It appears there is an aspirant to that honor.

PRESTON

You don't understand.

HIRAM

I think I am beginning to.

PRESTON

In the cities it may be the proper thing for a woman to keep a man-servant, but in Gosport . . . er . . . a . . .

HIRAM (*sweetly*)

Well?

PRESTON

It won't do.

HIRAM (*mildly inquiring*)

Gosport thinks it improper?

PRESTON

Very much so.

HIRAM (*as if receiving great light*)

Ah!

PRESTON

Now that you know the circumstances, I 'm sure you will see that the only thing for you to do is to leave town.

HIRAM

And would that fully restore Mrs. Perkins to the arms of Gosport society?

PRESTON (*irritated at the satire*)

There is no need of putting such an extreme construction upon what I have said, but it would serve her best interests.

HIRAM

Then I think you may count upon my early disappearance.

PRESTON

Good!

HIRAM

However, I shall lay the case before Mrs. Perkins. If she prefers to consider the economy of her digestive organs in preference to the social bias of Gosport, I shall not attempt to leave. If, however, she is resigned to having her beefsteak pounded and fried by the local hired girl, I will . . . (*He makes a gesture expressive of departure*)

PRESTON

Yes, but —

HIRAM (*sweetly, but firmly*)

I hardly think you can ask more even of a philosopher.

[*He strolls over to the case and puts his basket on the floor. Preston is dissatisfied and mystified.*

PRESTON

Perhaps not. Still I hope you will do the manly thing.

[*During the last of this scene Mary Jane, dressed in her best to see the parade, with bright hair ribbons and her Sunday hat, meets Sheridan in front of the office. He gives her a note, which she puts in her pocket. Hiram observes this as he faces the door and puts down his basket. Sheridan passes on and Mary Jane enters the office, meeting Preston as he is leaving.*

MARY JANE

Hello!

PRESTON (*greeting her affectionately*)

Hello, Girlie!

MARY JANE

Oh, Mr. Preston, did you hear the band?

PRESTON

Yes.

MARY JANE

Was n't it just beautiful?

PRESTON

Very fine.

MARY JANE (*rapturously*)

And the Sons and Daughters of Freedom marching, and . . . oh, everything! It was just 'most like Fair time, was n't it?

PRESTON

Almost.

MARY JANE (*turning her beaming face on Hiram*)

Did you hear it, Nabal?

HIRAM (*with resignation*)

I did.

PRESTON (*speaking across Mary Jane to Hiram*)
I am obliged to you.
[*He meets Lewellyn in the doorway, the latter having sauntered back to work.*

LEWELLYN (*as Preston passes him and goes down the street*) Hooray for Preston! (*Enters and speaks, after receiving the pleasant thrill occasioned by Mary Jane's presence*) Hello, Mary Jane!

MARY JANE
Hello, Lewellyn!
[*She goes to her mother's desk and begins scribbling aimlessly. Hiram sees the pi on the table and the floor and examines it.*

HIRAM
Lewellyn Green, have you been meddling with this?

LEWELLYN (*sulkily going up to the form-table*)
That ain't none of your business.

HIRAM (*seizes him by the collar and almost sticks his nose on the form and into the pi*) Did you do that?

LEWELLYN
Lemme go!

HIRAM (*angrily and retaining his grip*)
Did you do it?

LEWELLYN
Naw, I did n't.

HIRAM (*shaking him*)
Speak the truth now.

LEWELLYN (*breaking away and backing off*)
Naw, I tell you. I ain't been inside the office since Mis' Perkins sent me after the rig.

HIRAM
Who was here when you left?

LEWELLYN

Gene and Mr. Preston. Say, this ain't none of your business. You ain't the boss here.

[*Hiram is rapidly thinking and paying no attention to him.*

MARY JANE

Lewellyn Green, don't you ever speak like that to Nabal again. Never as long as you live. (*She resumes her sketching*)

HIRAM (*rousing himself*)

He 's right. It is not my business. . . . (*Stops in front of the case and sees the pied story on the hook*) And yet . . . hm. (*Suddenly he peels off his coat, rolls up the sleeves of his shirt, takes the stick, and begins expertly to set up the story*)

LEWELLYN (*finding his voice at last, after having watched Hiram in open-mouthed astonishment*) See here, you ain't got no right to mess in that case. (*Hiram pays no attention, but works on*) Mis' Perkins, Mis' Perkins!

[*He runs off and down the street for help. Mary Jane runs up to the door and shouts after him.*

MARY JANE

Oh, you mean thing! Lewellyn Green, don't you dare! (*Turning to Hiram*) Ain't he awful? (*Comes down and stands at the end of the case, watching Hiram work*) My, you know how to set type, don't you?

HIRAM

I used to.

MARY JANE

You can stick it a lot faster than Gene.

HIRAM

And that 's not much of a compliment, either.

MARY JANE (*climbing up on the stool in front of the case*) How did you learn to do so many things?

HIRAM

Perhaps I had a fairy godmother, and perhaps I 'm a Jack of all trades and master of none.

MARY JANE

Oh, yes you are. You 're a splendid cook; and I know you can write about things.

HIRAM (*stopping his work suddenly*)

How did you know that?

MARY JANE

Why, sometimes I wake up in the night and I see the light shining from your room; and two or three times I listened at the crack of the door, and I heard the pencil going over the paper . . . oh, so *fast!* . . . *my*, just like anything.

HIRAM

So I 'm caught in the act.

MARY JANE

What are you writing? A cook book?

HIRAM (*falling into her point of view sympathetically*)

No. If I let you know, you won't tell anyone?

MARY JANE

Cross my heart, I won't.

HIRAM

I 'm writing a book about all the places governed by the United States.

MARY JANE

Goodness! How did you ever find out about them all?

HIRAM

I went to all the places to see what they had to eat, and in that way I found out other things that are not so important.

MARY JANE (*with conviction*)

Of course eating *is* more important than anything else.

HIRAM

Decidedly.

MARY JANE (*inspired*)

Oh say, will you make rice fritters for supper to-night? I just love them!

HIRAM

I 'll have to teach you to make them, so that when I 've gone away . . .

MARY JANE

Oh, please don't go away . . . you 're so chummy.

HIRAM

Am I?

MARY JANE

Yes, and you wait on us just like I 've read about in Lucille's novels, and you talk just like a gentleman, and . . .

HIRAM (*suddenly serious, stops typesetting*)

Like a gentleman? How do you mean?

MARY JANE

Why, you use good grammar and lots of big words . . . and you don't get excited when you talk . . . and . . . and you can quote all the big authors . . . and . . . oh, everything.

HIRAM

You are a keen observer. Strangely enough, though,

the authors, the grammar, and the big words don't make the best kind of a gentleman.

MARY JANE

How do you mean?

HIRAM

Some men are born gentlemen, others acquire gentleness, but the born kind are the only really nice ones.

MARY JANE

Is that so?

HIRAM (*a trace of bitterness underneath the humor*)

Yes, and when they use the very big words you may know they are the acquiring kind and use fine language so that people won't guess that their ancestors ate with their knives and chewed tobacco.

MARY JANE (*with solemn eyes*)

Then are you that kind?

HIRAM

Yes.

MARY JANE (*disillusioned*)

Oh! (*There is silence for a moment*) Well, I don't care! I like you.

HIRAM (*interested*)

Do you? Why?

MARY JANE

Oh, I just do, and you 've been ever so nice to me and made my favorite dishes whenever I 've asked you to.

HIRAM (*whimsically and with tenderness*)

So I paved the way to your heart with rice fritters. Well, I 'm very glad you like me, little Miss Mary Jane . . . more glad than you can possibly know. And when I go away from here, I promise you that I shall never try to please any little girl as I have you.

MARY JANE

Really and truly?

HIRAM

Really and truly. Yes, and before I go, I may ask you for a keepsake.

MARY JANE (*excited by the possibilities of romance*)

A lock of my hair?

HIRAM (*smiling*)

Perhaps.

[*Lucille comes along the street from the left, and Star Skinner, with Ivy Wilcox on his arm, enters from the right and passes her.*

IVY WILCOX (*triumphantly*)

Hello, Lucille!

[*They exit to the left, and Lucille, with a toss of her head, enters the shop.*

MARY JANE

Oh, Lucille, I 've got something for you. (*She takes the note from her pocket and hands it to her with much mystery in her tone and manner*) Here 's a note Somebody gave me for you. And they said it was very important.

LUCILLE (*throwing a look toward Hiram*)

Hush, don't tell everybody in town about it. (*She eagerly opens the note and reads it with a smile and glow on her face; as she finishes the note and raises her eyes, she encounters those of Hiram, and instantly resents his surveillance*)

HIRAM

No bad news I trust.

LUCILLE (*sharply*)

This is a private matter.

HIRAM

Ah, it does n't come in my department.

LUCILLE (*ignoring the question and looking around the office*) Where 's everybody? I thought the paper was coming out to-day. Why, what are you doing?

MARY JANE

Oh, Lucille, you just ought to see how fast Nabal can set type.

LUCILLE

Nabal? I don't understand.

HIRAM

One of my early accomplishments. I don't imagine your mother would object if I practised a little.

LUCILLE

I can't understand you at all. You seem to be laughing at us all the time, or at yourself, and you seem to know everything.

HIRAM

Not everything. For example, I don't know the contents of that note.

LUCILLE (*with a gasp, putting it behind her back*) Why, no . . .

HIRAM

But perhaps I can guess. Barrett Sheridan is trying to make an appointment with you.

LUCILLE (*with an effort to recover herself*) That is my affair.

HIRAM

And it is mine to . . . (*Realizing where his feelings are leading him and suddenly restraining himself*) Has your mother your confidence?

LUCILLE

Why should you ask me that?

HIRAM (*after a pause, with a shrug*)

You 're right . . . why should I? (*He resumes work*)

PORTIA (*drives up in front of the shop with an old man in the buggy beside her; she jumps out and helps the old notary out carefully*) Whoa! Much obliged, Mr. Dobbs. (*Calls*) Lewellyn!

MARY JANE

He is n't here, mother.

PORTIA

Plague take that boy! Here you, sonny! (*A boy comes running to her*) Take this around to Blanchard's. (*The boy jumps into the buggy and drives off with a flourish. Old Mr. Dobbs goes down the street. Portia enters the office briskly, holding in her hand a legal paper*) Well, both my chicks here. (*Takes off her hat and looks around. Hiram immediately stops work, rolls down his sleeves, and dons his coat*) Why, where 's Gene?

HIRAM

He had gone when I returned from marketing.

PORTIA (*puzzled and a little dazed at such an unwonted negligence on Gene's part*) Gone? . . . Gone! . . . And we 've got to hustle to press. I 've got Jenny Miller's affidavit here. (*At her desk*) It will mean Skinner's defeat.

LUCILLE

Yes, and it will mean yours and mine and Girlie's too!

PORTIA (*amazed at this sudden outburst*)

I thought we had settled all that. Surely it is n't on Star Skinner's account that you . . .

LUCILLE

Oh, what do I care about Star Skinner? He 's nothing to me.

PORTIA

Not since that actor came along.

LUCILLE

He never was. I went with him, of course. Who else was there to go with in this God-forsaken place? I went with him because he had money, and if the worst came to the worst, I could marry him and make him take me away where I could see something and learn something.

HIRAM (*picking up his basket*)

Shan't I go?

PORTIA (*strongly*)

No, stay. (*She looks across Lucille at him, as if commanding that he should stay and share the realization of the girl's difficult nature*)

LUCILLE (*half hysterical and wholly reckless*)

Oh, I don't care who knows it. Nabal has been out in the world. He sees how bound down we are here. We have n't even a fair chance. And you are making it so hard. (*Wildly*) Everyone is talking about you, mother.

PORTIA

Lucille!

LUCILLE

Oh, you don't hear it, but I do, and Girlie will. Wait until she 's a little older . . . then things will fall on her as they have on me. But I 'm going to get away from it. What life has a girl here, with no father and no money, shut up in this horrible

little town and no one to help you get a chance? But I 'll have it. You see if I don't, mother, you just see.

[*She rushes out of the office and down the street. Portia and Hiram stand looking at each other in painful silence; Mary Jane stands between them, her rosy face full of sympathy and distress.*

MARY JANE

I 'm sorry everything 's so wrong, Mumsey. . . . (*The others can think of nothing to say*) Shall I go home with Lucille?

PORTIA (*in a low, broken voice*)

Yes, dear, do.

MARY JANE

All right. (*Looking wistfully at Hiram*) You know all about everything, Nabal . . . help Mumsey, won't you?

HIRAM (*slowly*)

If she wishes it.

MARY JANE

That 's good. (*Runs out and down the street*) Oh, Lucille, Lucille, wait!

[*Portia stands by her desk, silent and bitter; as she does not speak, Hiram prepares to go.*

HIRAM

Mr. Preston called and was . . .

PORTIA (*quickly, as she pulls herself together with an effort*) Yes, I know. I saw him here before I went to the factory. (*Trying to force her mind on the work at hand*) I wonder where Gene is. He ought to be hard at work. This affidavit must be set up. (*Goes to the case, puts the affidavit on the hook, is rolling up her sleeves to begin setting it up, when*

her eyes light on the pied story) My God, who did this?

HIRAM (*stopping on his way to the door*)
What?

PORTIA
Pied this story.

HIRAM
I don't know.

PORTIA (*savagely*)
Did you?

HIRAM (*controlling a flash of indignation*)
No, I did not. (*It is apparent that he is trying to place the blame; suddenly a thought strikes him and he makes a swift gesture*)

PORTIA (*eagerly*)
What is it?

HIRAM
I think I know who did it.

PORTIA (*quickly*)
Who?

HIRAM
Your friend . . . (*Suddenly changes his mind about telling her*) No. . . . no . . . I was mistaken.

PORTIA (*growing desperate and losing her head a little*)
And Gene has gone. . . . What can he mean by it? . . . He would n't sell me out to Skinner.

HIRAM
Your merry Eugene is an imbecile, but an honest one, I think.

PORTIA (*pacing about wildly and going up to the engine and press*) The paper should be out now. (*She sees the monkey wrench on the floor and picks it up*) What 's this doing here? The press was all

right this morning. (*Intuitively divining that something serious is amiss with the machinery*) The engine is . . . (*Looking it over*) The starting-wheel is gone . . . the arm is loose . . . the press is useless.

HIRAM (*loitering at the door, loath to leave*)
Any orders, ma'am.

PORTIA (*with arms and shoulders drooping she stands before the press, beaten and despairing*) The paper can't come out. After the fight I 've made. It 's all for nothing . . . the paper can't come out. (*A low moan escapes her; suddenly she realizes that Hiram is standing in the door — Hiram who knows all the tricks of the trade; she turns and calls with a note of appeal in her voice*) Hiram!

HIRAM (*respectfully*)
Did you say Nabal?

PORTIA (*abandoning all reserve in her manner*)
No, I said Hiram. Don't go . . . I . . . I want your advice. I need your help.

HIRAM (*coming down to her*)
I am at your service.

PORTIA
The press is useless; what shall I do?

HIRAM (*thinking quickly*)
Send the forms to the next town and get them printed.

PORTIA
The papers there would n't do it. Besides, there is n't time. Skinner has every paper in the district fixed but the "Clarion." Can't you see I 've got a story that will keep him from getting the nomination? He 's a rascal and a thief. My paper can

defeat him, I know, if it 's out before the Convention meets this afternoon.

HIRAM (*meeting her appealing look with a significant expression*) Do you think you can afford to defeat him?

PORTIA

If a man had taken the stand I have in his paper, would n't he try to defeat him?

HIRAM

Yes, unless he were bought off.

PORTIA

Well, this is n't a question of sex.

HIRAM

I 'm afraid it is more so than you think.

PORTIA (*reading his meaning in his face*)

You mean . . . that . . . ?

HIRAM

Yes. Rome Preston admires you. You champion his fight . . . the conclusion is obvious.

PORTIA (*crestfallen for the moment*)

Oh. It 's because he 's an honest man that I want him to win.

HIRAM (*a slightly perceptible smile of scepticism*)

Yes?

PORTIA

But I 'll tell you, too, that he *has* seemed to care for me, and if I had been a free woman I presume I should have married him. (*A little pause; she looks steadily at him*) Now will you help me?

HIRAM

Yes, I think I will. (*He puts down his basket, and with it every vestige of the servant; his eyes take*

in the detail of the plant's resources and rest on the press back of the counter) Can that old press be used?

PORTIA

I don't know. It needs doctoring.

[*Hiram pulls off his coat, rolls up his sleeves, and sets briskly to work. He jumps over the counter and gets from the shelf an oil can and some waste. He sweeps the débris from the top of the old fly-wheel hand-press. For the moment his customary nonchalance has gone. Portia is at the case with her sleeves rolled up and sticking type as she sets up the affidavit. Both have unconsciously dropped into the old relationship easily and naturally.*

HIRAM

I 'll see what I can do with this. I saw the pi and set up the story again. I notice that you are running your affidavit for a heading.

PORTIA (*sticking type in a workman-like manner, but by no means as fast as Hiram*) Yes, most of the story was set up. All I needed was Jenny Miller's story attested by the notary. . . . Only a few lines more. Thank Heaven you set up the rest of the story.

HIRAM (*busily oiling all parts of the old press*)

This looks as if it came out of the ark.

PORTIA

It 's just like the one you and I ran in Medairyville.

HIRAM (*working busily*)

Has the business paid for the new press?

PORTIA

Not yet. The bank holds my notes for six hundred dollars.

HIRAM

Is Skinner one of the directors?

PORTIA

Yes.

HIRAM

You know what he 'll do if he does n't get the nomination.

PORTIA

What?

HIRAM

Try to sell you up.

PORTIA (*pausing for a moment*)

He can try it and be . . .

HIRAM (*also pausing*)

Allow me . . . damned.

PORTIA

Thanks. (*Both resume work with a smile*)

HIRAM (*after a short silence*)

You are a brave woman, but a foolish one. However, one must be foolish to be brave. . . . We 'll cut down the size of the paper. . . . Can you lock the forms?

PORTIA

Yes.

HIRAM

You 'll have to make it one page.

PORTIA

I don't care if it 's one column. The story of the Miller foreclosure will keep Skinner from getting even a run for his money.

[*Hiram stoops and is cleaning and oiling the lower part of the press. Down the street and into the shop come Skinner and his adviser Whipple, a typi-*

cal country politician, about fifty years old, pompous, and assured. Skinner appears to be a little scared and conciliatory. Neither of them can see Hiram, and they observe with palpable satisfaction that Portia is apparently alone.

SKINNER (*to Portia, who does not look up from her stick*) Good afternoon, Mis' Perkins. May we have a word with you?

PORTIA

You may.

SKINNER

I guess you know Mr. Whipple.

PORTIA

I do.

WHIPPLE

Howdy do. Yes . . . yes. . . . It seems a pity, Mrs. Perkins, for the "Clarion" to be on the off-side.

PORTIA

Off-side?

WHIPPLE

Why, yes. You might as well get into the band wagon. We 've heard about that story you are going to print about our candidate.

SKINNER (*coming to the case and getting close to her*) Yes, and we 're ready to make a dicker.

PORTIA (*working away*)

I understand.

WHIPPLE

We are willing to pay you a hundred dollars not to print it.

PORTIA (*without looking up*)

Too cheap.

SKINNER

Oh, I know you 've hed a hard time to git along, and I don't mind makin' it two hundred.

PORTIA (*still intent on her work*)

Too cheap.

SKINNER

Now don't be too graspin'!

PORTIA

The story goes in.

[*Whipple whispers to Skinner.*

SKINNER (*confidently*)

Well, I 'll take up yer notes at the bank and give 'em to you.

PORTIA

No, I shall run the story. (*She goes up to form-table, puts the story in the form, and locks it*)

SKINNER

Great Cæsar's ghost, woman, what do you want?

PORTIA

I want Joel Skinner to retire from the contest. That 's my price and the only one.

SKINNER (*in a fury*)

Lay down and let Rome Preston walk in?

WHIPPLE

What do you think we are?

PORTIA (*to Whipple*) I think you 're a grafter. (*To Skinner*) And I know you 're a thief.

[*Skinner begins to rage.*

WHIPPLE

Don't waste your breath, Skinner. She 'll listen to reason or she 'll take the consequences. (*He goes up to the door and closes it, as if preparing to hold the place and prevent any business going on*)

PORTIA

Get out of my office.

SKINNER

We 'll draw out the " Clarion's " fangs first. (*He catches hold of the form-table as if to overthrow it*)

PORTIA (*catching up the mallet from the table*)

If you lay hands on anything in this office, I 'll smash your heads.

[*This staggers them for a moment. Hiram, hearing it all, has slid over the counter and quietly reopened the doors.*

WHIPPLE

We 'll hold the fort here until the Convention is over.

HIRAM

This is our busy day. Will you be good enough to be on your way? (*His threatening eye and the gathering crowd on the street decide them*)

SKINNER

Who 's this?

HIRAM

Outside, please. (*The men exit, dazed and dumfounded. Hiram goes to the form-table*) I believe the old press will work.

[*Together they roll the form-table to the counter, lift it up, and from there get it onto the press. Lewellyn enters from the street.*

LEWELLYN (*he too is dumfounded at seeing Hiram at work on the old press*) Say, what are you doin' now?

PORTIA (*taking her position to feed the hand-press and pull off the printed sheet*) Come on in here,

Lewellyn, and fold these papers. You 'll have to deliver them too.

LEWELLYN (*wide-eyed*)

Say, you can't go to press without Gene.

PORTIA

Can't I? I 'll do it if I drop beside this old threshing machine.

LEWELLYN

By Gosh!

[*Hiram turns the flywheel, Portia feeds the press and throws the printed sheets to Lewellyn over the counter. He folds them on the floor. The crowd, amazed at the strange sight, crowd around the door.*

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

PERSONS

Portia Perkins
Lucille Perkins
Mary Jane Perkins
Miss Faxon
Ivy Wilcox
Mrs. Wilcox
Hiram Perkins
Rome Preston
Barrett Sheridan
Joel Skinner
Star Skinner
Claud Whitcomb
Linc Watkins
Eugene Merryfield
Lewellyn Green
Jim
Girls and boys at Ivy's party
A crowd of Gosport's male and female citizens

THE THIRD ACT

It is the evening of the next day. The scene is the yard of the Perkins home, showing the side and rear of the house, a small kitchen porch at the back, and the side porch. A door leads from the side porch into the living-room seen in the first act. A picket fence with a gate at the right runs across the upper stage; beyond that is the road and the yard of the neighbor across the way, thickly screened with foliage. In perspective above the trees are a couple of church spires and the roof of the school. In the centre of the yard is a large tree, from which is suspended a swing. A hedge at the left divides the yard from that of the Wilcox's, and just beyond it a wing of the Wilcox home juts out. The two windows visible, one facing the audience and the other looking toward the Perkins yard, are brilliantly lighted. In the Perkins yard are two garden benches, one against the hedge down the left, the other up against the fence. The usual geranium and nasturtium beds grow around the side porch and near the hedge; a flower-box of trailing vines is against the porch rail. At the back of the house hollyhocks, sunflowers, and golden-glows grow near the kitchen. A rug is on the side porch and two or three cotton-covered cushions on the steps.

Portia is discovered sitting on the side porch in a rocking-chair, a light shawl thrown over her shoulders. Her face is pale and strained. Her head is thrown

back, and she seems looking up at the heavens, as if to find there an answer to the problems of her life. The bay window jutting beyond the porch back of her discloses the shaded lamp, the glow of which is thrown across the yard and illumines Mary Jane, who is in the swing "letting the old cat die." Leaning in the doorway of the kitchen is Hiram, dressed in dark trousers, white shirt and belt, coatless, and wearing a man's white apron with one corner tucked up, turn-down collar, and dark tie. As he leans against the door casement, he too is looking up at the same group of stars from which Portia is seeking inspiration. Over everything there broods a quiet tension.

Presently Ivy Wilcox, dressed in a stiffly starched white dress, white canvas shoes, and gay ribbons, runs across the stage and enters the gate.

IVY (*as she comes in at the gate*)
Hello, Mary Jane!

MARY JANE
Hello, Ivy!

IVY (*running up on the porch and quite breathless*)
Oh say, Mis' Perkins. I 'm goin' to have a party to-night and we ain't got near enough napkins or spoons to go round. Kin I borrow some of yours?

PORTIA
I 'll get them for you.

IVY
Oh, don't stir yourself, I 'll ask *him* fer 'em.

PORTIA
The napkins are in the sideboard drawer.

IVY
All right. Maw's made ice cream and four kinds of

cake, so they ought to have a good time. (*She goes into the sitting-room*)

MARY JANE (*with eager interest*)

Mumsey, did Ivy say she was going to have a party?

PORTIA

Yes.

MARY JANE

Well, she did n't invite me to it.

PORTIA

You are a little bit too young for Ivy's parties.

MARY JANE

Well, maybe I am, but Lucille ain't. I don't believe she 's invited her.

PORTIA (*a weary note in her voice*)

Very likely not.

MARY JANE (*with childish insistency*)

But why?

PORTIA

Let us not ask, dearie.

[*Mary Jane resumes her swinging with an air of juvenile gloom.*

Down the street from the left comes Lucille, with a pile of books under her arms. She enters the gate and is about to go into the house.

PORTIA

Where have you been, dear?

LUCILLE (*coming to the porch steps in front of Portia*)

To the school building.

PORTIA

What for?

LUCILLE (*sitting on the steps and tossing down the books in the angle*) I got the janitor to let me in to get my books.

PORTIA (*leaning forward anxiously and trying to see the girl's face*) Why, Lucille, you 're not —

LUCILLE

I 'm never going to school again, mother.

PORTIA

Why, you surely won't —

LUCILLE

Never, never. I can't bear it . . . I can't stand it.

PORTIA (*after a painful little pause*)

Is it because of what people are saying?

LUCILLE (*wincing*)

Don't ask me, mother, please.

PORTIA

I . . . I won't, dear.

[*She rises with a look of discouragement and goes into the house. Lucille goes up and throws herself down on a bench against the fence, her head on her arms, moodily thinking.*

Ivy Wilcox, with a pile of napkins in one arm and the other hand grasping a lot of spoons, comes out on the rear porch from the kitchen, followed by Hiram.

IVY

Much obliged to you fer gittin' them fer me.

HIRAM (*with a gallant smile*)

The pleasure is all mine, Miss Wilcox.

IVY (*backing down the steps, laughing*)

My land, you talk just like our preacher.

HIRAM

I don't think I deserve that.

IVY (*giggling*)

He, he! Ain't you awful? Makin' fun of the

preacher. I 'm afraid you ain't never had a change of heart.

HIRAM

You might try to effect one. . . . You have been very successful with Eugene.

IVY (*sniggering with pleased vanity*)

Oh, you git out! . . . Of course I can't help seein' he 's crazy about me, but I ain't encouragin' Gene Merryfield none.

HIRAM

No?

IVY (*with sudden seriousness*)

No siree. . . . I think an elocutionist ought to be careful who she marries, don't you?

HIRAM (*gravely*)

Undoubtedly. She should make sure of the man's powers of resistance and endurance.

IVY

Oh, you 're jokin' me now!

HIRAM

Oh no . . . no indeed! I hope your party will be a great success.

IVY

'T won't be our fault if it ain't. We 've took down the bed in the spare room.

HIRAM

Really?

IVY

Em-hm! So 's them that ain't dancers kin set in there and play authors.

HIRAM

Oh, joy!

IVY

Some of the boys 'll want to play Pedro, but Maw won't have gamblin' cards in the house.

HIRAM

Noble woman!

IVY (*sincerely desiring to settle an ethical point*)

Do you think it 's a sin fer a man to play Pedro?

HIRAM (*solemnly*)

I think it 's a crime.

MRS. WILCOX (*calling from her window*)

Ivy!

IVY (*bawling*)

Yes, Maw!

MRS. WILCOX

You 've got to hurry! (*She disappears*)

IVY

Maw wants me. I gotta go. Good-bye!

HIRAM

Au revoir! (*He goes back into the kitchen*)

IVY (*runs home and calls out as she passes Lucille*)

Good evening! (*As she gets outside the gate, she meets a girl going to her party; they "lock arms" and laughingly enter Ivy's yard; Ivy comes around to the hedge*) Oh say, Lucille! (*Lucille goes over toward her*) You ain't mad 'cause I did n't invite you to my party, are you?

LUCILLE (*her voice cold*)

I had n't thought anything about it.

IVY (*blankly*)

Oh! (*An embarrassed pause*) Well, I wanted to invite you, but lots of 'em that 's comin' would n't like it on account of all the talk about . . . about *her* (*nodding her head toward the house*). And . . .

and then, too, Star Skinner 's comin'. (*This last information with a triumphant note*) My land, I got to hurry! It 's time they was beginning to come.

[*Ivy scurries around into the house. Several young men and girls pass on the way to the party. Mary Jane has gone to the kitchen steps and sits meditating in a gentle melancholy with her chin in her hand. Hiram, coming out of the kitchen, observes her.*

HIRAM

Why so pensive and so grave, little Miss Mary Jane?

MARY JANE

I was just thinking that if I should die to-night, Ivy Wilcox would be sorry she did n't invite me to her party.

HIRAM

I 'm sure she would be consumed with remorse.

MARY JANE

They 're going to have ice cream and four kinds of cake.

HIRAM

And an awful pain in their tummies. Come in the kitchen and let me show you a cake I 've made for you.

MARY JANE (*brightly*)

Oh!

[*Mary Jane follows Hiram into the kitchen. Lucille stands leaning against the fence. Star Skinner and another young man enter from the right on their way to Ivy's party.*

STAR

Hello, Lucille!

LUCILLE
Hello!

YOUNG MAN
Hello, Lucille!

LUCILLE
Hello, Jim!

[*Star sends Jim into Ivy's house; he comes around on the Wilcox side of the hedge.*

STAR
Say, Lucille, can I speak to you for a minute?

LUCILLE (*coming down*)
I suppose so. Will you come over?

STAR
No, thanks. I 'm over to Ivy Wilcox's party.

LUCILLE (*indifferently*)
Oh, indeed!

STAR
Say, have you lost anything?

LUCILLE (*reading his leering smile with alarm*)
What do you mean? (*Suddenly she runs to her books on the steps, picks up one and looks inside the cover as if expecting to find something there*) Why . . . it 's gone . . . why . . . (*Standing up*) You 've got it!

STAR
Got what?

LUCILLE (*excitedly, going over to him*)
You 've got it . . . my letter . . . a note for me . . . I must have dropped it.

STAR
You did . . . right in front of our store, too. Kind of an important thing to drop, too, was n't it?

LUCILLE (*terrified*)

You . . . you did n't read it?

STAR (*with a brutal sneer and smile*)

Course I did. How else would I know it was so important?

LUCILLE

You sneak!

STAR (*his smile giving place to boyish temper and anger*) Oh, shoot! I ain't no more of a sneak than that actor fellow . . . coaxin' you to run away with him.

LUCILLE (*with a gesture of alarm*)

Hush!

STAR

Oh, afraid somebody 'll hear, are you? Well, what do you think I care? You 've played with me like a trout on a hook. You 've kept company with me fer two years, and now you 're tryin' to make a show and a laughin' stock of me to the hull town.

LUCILLE

Oh, I 'm not thinking of you at all.

STAR

Oh, you ain't, eh? Well I am.

LUCILLE

You . . . you contemptible country jay!

STAR (*wild at this thrust*)

Country jay, am I? Well, he 's from the city . . . see what he makes of you. *I 'd* a married you.

LUCILLE (*tensely*)

Stop that!

STAR (*venomously*)

I guess it ain't to be wondered at. Where men are

concerned you 're cut off the same piece as your mother.

[*Lucille springs forward and gives him a ringing slap across the face.*

LUCILLE

You coward you!

STAR (*catching both her arms above the elbow across the hedge and holding her like a vice*) You little devil!

LUCILLE (*white with rage*)

Get away from me . . . and don't you ever dare speak to me again. . . . *Don't you dare!*

STAR (*backs away with a derisive laugh, but holding his face, which is burning from the blow*) Good riddance . . . that 's all I 've got to say to you. . . . Good riddance . . . that 's all!

[*Lucille, panting with anger and humiliation, runs into the house by the side door.*

Mary Jane and Hiram come out from the kitchen and sit side by side on the kitchen steps.

MARY JANE

I 've got something for you, Nabal.

HIRAM

What have you got for me?

MARY JANE (*taking a package from her pocket*)

Here 's a lock of my hair and my tintype that the man took when I went to the Fourth of July. You know you asked me for a keepsake.

HIRAM (*taking it and looking at the contents with deep interest*) Thank you, Mary Jane. I 'm sorry I can't go to the Fourth with you next year. And here is something I want you to take care of. It 's for your mother. A sort of joke on old Skinner.

(*He takes a long envelope out of his pocket, looks at it with a smile, and speaks half to himself*) It is the first-fruits of the labor of my life. It 's the proof to your mother that for once I was man enough to . . .

MARY JANE (*puzzled over his words, puts her hand on his arm*) Yes, but what is it *really?*

HIRAM

It 's the root of all evil, my dear; but when it is planted carefully, nearly all the good things of life grow from it.

MARY JANE (*examining the envelope in wonderment*) Oh my! But how did you get it?

HIRAM

I got it for writing the book I told you about.

MARY JANE

Oh! (*flatly disappointed*) . . . Are n't you going to give me something to remember you by?

HIRAM

Do you want a keepsake too?

MARY JANE

Yes, I do.

HIRAM

Then I 'm going to send you a copy of my book. You won't be able to understand the book part of it, but some day I hope you will know what the dedication means.

MARY JANE

Dedication? What 's that?

HIRAM

It 's the page before the preface, and it says "To M. J., who, at a very early age, prompted the tour in search of material, and who later in life inspired

the completion of the work, this book is affectionately dedicated."

MARY JANE (*slowly*)

To M. J. . . . M. J. . . . Why, is that me?

HIRAM

Yes.

MARY JANE

Printed on the page?

HIRAM

Yes.

MARY JANE

Oh, Nabal! (*Too overcome for the moment for further speech*) I don't exactly understand, but I feel awful proud.

HIRAM (*moved*)

Do you . . . well then . . . that makes me proud too . . . that is, as proud as is possible for a Doldub to feel.

MARY JANE (*unconscious of his bitter smile and gibe at himself*) What 's a Doldub?

HIRAM (*catching at the whimsey as a relief from his mood*) Why, did you never hear about the Doldubs? . . . They 're awfully funny.

MARY JANE

Is it a story?

HIRAM

Yes.

MARY JANE (*all eagerness and attention*)

Tell me about them.

HIRAM

Well . . . let me see. . . . Once upon a time there were some strange birds called Doldubs, and in an

old tree in a very wobbly nest there lived a family of Doldubs.

MARY JANE

How many?

HIRAM

Well, at first there was only Dippy Doldub and Dappy Doldub, but one spring morning Dotty Doldub was born —

MARY JANE

Oh, a baby bird?

HIRAM

Yes, and a long time after that Dolly Doldub was born. And then the nest was so full of Baby Doldubs that Dippy Doldub flew away.

MARY JANE

Away from the little Doldubs?

HIRAM

Yes. He was a yellow bird.

MARY JANE

Were they all yellow?

HIRAM

No, only Dippy. He was the only yellow one. He went away off to another country.

MARY JANE

Can a Doldub fly that far?

HIRAM

My dear, a Doldub can fly all around the world.

MARY JANE

Where did he go?

HIRAM

Oh, wherever he felt like going. He just kept flying around for years and years.

MARY JANE

But what were the other Doldubs doing?

HIRAM

They were in the nest, and Dappy Doldub was getting all the bugs and worms to feed Dotty and Dolly Doldub.

MARY JANE

Poor old Mamma Doldub! What happened then?

HIRAM

Why then . . . then there came to the nest a very fine bird.

MARY JANE

What kind . . . a Doldub bird?

HIRAM

No, this was a Law . . . a Lawgaritis bird.

MARY JANE

What did he do?

HIRAM

He sang pretty songs to Dappy Doldub . . . such pretty songs that she forgot all about Dippy and his tiresome ways, and her plumage grew brighter and more beautiful every day . . . until one day a terrible thing happened.

MARY JANE

What?

HIRAM

Dippy Doldub flew back to the nest.

MARY JANE

Oh, why did he?

HIRAM

I wonder . . . probably he didn't know himself. You see, he was a no-account Dippy bird. Still, when he saw that Dappy was so happy, he wanted

to give her a chance to build a nest with a nice bird that was n't so fond of flying away.

MARY JANE

And did he?

HIRAM (*slowly*)

Yes . . . he . . . he did.

MARY JANE

But what became of Dippy?

HIRAM

Dippy? Why . . . he put out to sea.

MARY JANE

Like a boat?

HIRAM

No, a Doldub flies like a balloon, straight up in the air.

MARY JANE

Over the deep water?

HIRAM

Yes, and to keep himself from going down he broke off a piece of the tenth commandment and threw it out for ballast.

MARY JANE

But what became of Dippy then?

HIRAM

I suppose he thought himself to death and was buried with literary honors by the Ancient Order of Rainbow-Chasers.

MARY JANE

Where did they bury him?

HIRAM

In the Garden of the Ne'er-Do-Wells, with an epigram at his head and a joke at his feet, and little

caps and bells growing over him. (*The pause that follows is filled with bitter, scourging thoughts*)

MARY JANE (*blinking*)

Poor old Dippy, I 'm sorry for him.

[*Loud laughter and screams from the crowd over at the Wilcox's.*

MALE VOICE

Let 's play Post Office!

[*Shouts of assent are heard.*

FEMALE VOICE

Billy, you be the first postmaster.

[*Loud laughter and clapping of hands. Mary Jane, fascinated by the sounds of revelry, runs over to the hedge and looks through the Wilcox window wistfully; then she saunters out the gate and over in front of Ivy's house.*

Hiram sits buried in thought.

Portia comes out of the kitchen door. Hiram rises and makes way for her; there is an embarrassed pause as he waits for her to speak. She seems unable to find anything to say for the moment.

HIRAM (*by way of relieving the tension*)

I left everything all right at the office. The next issue is ready to go to press. Gene can run it off.

PORTIA

I appreciate your doing the work there, and here too.

HIRAM (*ignoring her expressions of gratitude*)

The eulogy of the democratic nominee is written. Here are the proofs. (*He takes a roll of proofs from his hip pocket and hands them to her*) If you think it does Mr. Preston justice it will go in.

PORTIA (*feeling the difficulty of the situation*)

I . . . I thank you.

HIRAM

You should be able to resume your work again in a day or two.

PORTIA (*with a nervous attempt at a smile*)

Yes. I can't afford to indulge in nerves any longer.

HIRAM (*after another strained pause*)

Before I leave —

PORTIA (*startled*)

Before you leave? Why . . . why are you going?

HIRAM

Mr. Preston made it plain to me yesterday that my presence was a menace to your social and business popularity.

PORTIA

Rome Preston asked you to go away?

HIRAM

Yes.

PORTIA (*after a moment's thoughtful silence*)

What . . . what did you say to him?

HIRAM

Things that I fear annoyed him. Your admiring friend has a very negligible sense of humor.

PORTIA

Did you . . . did you tell him about us?

HIRAM (*resenting the question*)

No.

PORTIA

I thank you for your silence.

HIRAM

My instincts at times are not wholly unworthy, I hope.

PORTIA

I beg your pardon. (*Another pause*) I want to explain how it was with us. His coming into my life . . . his admiration and his caring for me kept me alive . . . it made me feel that . . . that I was still a woman even though I was doing a man's work.

HIRAM

My work.

PORTIA

I did n't mean that.

HIRAM

I know that you did n't, but it 's true.

PORTIA

I want you to understand what was between us, and —

HIRAM

I have not misunderstood. I know you and your ideal of life. It has all been right and natural and human. If I had known . . . I should not have come back. . . . Do me the justice to believe that.

PORTIA

I do believe you.

[*Mary Jane and Preston come along the fence from the left and enter the gate.*

MARY JANE (*calling out*)

Oh, Mumsey, here 's Mr. Preston to see you.

[*Hiram makes an involuntary move, as if to stop her passing him on the way to meet Preston, but recovers himself immediately and goes out into the kitchen as Portia greets Preston by the porch steps. Mary Jane resumes her watch at the hedge.*

PRESTON (*taking Portia's hand in greeting*)

Portia!

PORTIA (*trying to assume a bright mood*)

I have n't had a chance to congratulate you before, but you know what I feel.

PRESTON

It was your victory rather than mine, and I 'm afraid you have bought it dearly.

PORTIA

What do you mean?

PRESTON

Why, this man you 've got here —

PORTIA (*nervously*)

He is going away. And after that I 'll tell you everything. He nas been doing my work at the office to-day. Rome, he has written a splendid eulogy of you.

PRESTON

What?

PORTIA

It will be in the next issue. Here it is. (*She shows him the proofs*)

PRESTON

Don't print that.

PORTIA

Why not?

PRESTON

I can't be under the obligation to him.

PORTIA

Why, Rome . . .

PRESTON

I talked with him yesterday. The man is unusual . . . he is no servant, and . . . well . . . to be honest with you, I 'm jealous of him.

PORTIA (*reacting*)

Oh!

PRESTON

I confess it. I feel that he loves you. (*She attempts to speak, but he silences her with a gesture*) He said nothing, but I felt it. (*She turns away*) Forgive me for talking like this . . . you had a terrible day yesterday, and I 'm afraid I have n't very cheering news for you.

PORTIA (*quickly*)

What do you mean?

PRESTON

Skinner has bought up your notes from the bank.

PORTIA

No!

PRESTON

Yes, he has taken his defeat just as I said he would.

PORTIA

He 'll sell me out. (*With almost a sob*) Oh, Rome!

PRESTON (*tenderly*)

Let me help you. Let me lend you the money.

PORTIA

No, that would n't do. . . . Oh, I ought to have expected this. He has stopped at nothing. He pied the Miller story.

PRESTON

It was n't Skinner who did that.

PORTIA

Do *you* know who did it?

PRESTON

Yes.

MALE VOICE (*at the Wilcox's*)

I only know the chorus.

[To the accompaniment of a cabinet organ, a baritone voice of uncertain quality and style strikes up the chorus of "Love Me and the World is Mine." Other voices join in, after which there is much laughter and applause.

Preston and Portia have entered the house, and Portia is seen sitting by the lamp in the bay window talking to Preston, who is invisible.

Hiram takes down a dark coat and his old soft hat from a nail on the kitchen wall by the door, and donning them comes into the yard and stands on the path watching Portia through the window.

Mary Jane stands at the hedge listening to the music.

MARY JANE (*when the song is over*)
Are n't they having a good time?

HIRAM
Yes, I believe they are even capable of enjoying that song.

MARY JANE (*crossing the yard and going to the side porch*) I guess I 'll go to bed. It 's so aggravating to hear a party when you 're not to it.

HIRAM (*looking through the bay window*)
Yes, it is irritating.

MARY JANE
I wish you were n't going away, Nabal. Whenever I think about it, I feel all choky. (*She stands on the step leading to the porch*)

HIRAM (*standing by the post, his voice husky as he speaks*) Do you?

MARY JANE
Eh-hm! (*Giving her hand to him*) Good night, Nabal.

HIRAM (*takes her hand and strokes it, then her hair, as if loath to relinquish the contact*) Good night, little Mary Jane.

MARY JANE (*as he releases her she goes to the door and turns to him again*) I wish you just belonged to us. Then you 'd have to stay.

HIRAM (*looking toward Portia*)
Yes, that 's the trouble. I don't seem to belong. Good night.

MARY JANE
Good night, Nabal.

[*She goes out and a moment later is seen kissing her mother good night. Hiram, standing in the shadow, sees it.*

The singers at the party strike up the chorus of "On the Wabash."

Hiram pulls his hat over his eyes and buttons up his coat, goes to the gate, and stands outside it, as if for a last look before taking to the road.

During the previous scene Lucille has been seen flitting about the upper room over the kitchen, the window of which is open and directly over the kitchen door. She now comes cautiously and furtively through the kitchen door, wearing her best hat and light jacket and carrying a small telescope grip. She is nervous and agitated. She runs down the path, pausing for a second as she passes the window where her mother is sitting, and shrinking into the shadow of the tree, then on quickly to the gate.

Hiram has watched her coming and holds the gate closed from the other side.

LUCILLE (*frightened at meeting him, but speaking peremptorily*) Let me pass, please.

HIRAM

Where are you going?

LUCILLE

That is my affair. Let me pass.

HIRAM (*entering through the gate, but holding it shut after him*) What are you doing with a grip?

LUCILLE (*backing down from the gate*)

I want you to let me out of that gate.

HIRAM (*following her and taking the grip from her*) I shall not do so. (*She tries to force her way past him, but he bars the way*) No, you can't go. (*He tosses the grip on the garden seat*)

LUCILLE (*coming down under the tree and furious*) Oh, if I were only a man —

HIRAM (*following her; both are speaking in low tones to prevent Portia from overhearing them*) If you were a man, you would n't be running off with Barrett Sheridan.

LUCILLE (*shrinking back*)

Why, how . . . how did you know?

HIRAM

I saw him at the end of the street just now, and your appearance is significant.

LUCILLE

I don't see why you should interfere. You 've done enough since you came here.

HIRAM

What do you mean?

LUCILLE (*in sheer desperation*)

Your coming to work for us has set the whole town against mother. People are saying terrible things . . . all lies, I know, but they will ruin us just the same. I 'm going to get out of it. I 'm going to

be happy. Oh, please let me go. I *do* love Barrett, and he loves me. Why do you stand in the way?

HIRAM

If Mr. Sheridan is the man he should be, he will come and ask for you *like* a man.

LUCILLE (*almost beside herself*)

But mother won't listen to him. Everyone here is against her and they are all snubbing me. I won't stay here. Barrett will take me away and we will be married. (*Reads the question in his face*) Oh, I would n't go any other way. (*Realizes that there is no relaxing in his grim face*) Oh, why do I tell you all this? You don't care. No one cares but mother and Girlie, and they don't understand. But I 'm going to get out of it. I 'm going to see the world and —

HIRAM (*involuntarily*)

And live.

LUCILLE (*catching up the word, her face alight*)

Yes, that 's it . . . *live* and see others live. Hear grand music, and see plays and pictures and beautiful scenery, and great people and everything. Oh, I want to see *everything.*

HIRAM (*softly*)

I know . . . I know what that longing is.

LUCILLE

You do?

[*Drawn to him by their common feeling, she puts out her hands; he takes them and is just drawing her toward him when the gate clicks and Barrett Sheridan enters the yard, tense and anxious.*

SHERIDAN

Lucille . . . Lucille! I 've been waiting half an hour.

LUCILLE (*coming to herself*)

Yes, I know. (*She starts toward him and Hiram steps between them*)

HIRAM

Lucille is doing nicely where she is. She is not going to run away with you.

SHERIDAN

See here, Evans, you keep out of this.

HIRAM

Do you think your father would be proud to learn that his son had coaxed this little country girl away from her home? And that under an assumed name?

LUCILLE

What do you say?

SHERIDAN

Do you mean to say that you think I 'm not on the level with Lucille? What nonsense! . . . I gave her mother fair warning that I 'd get Lucille the best way I could.

HIRAM

And is this the best way?

SHERIDAN

Oh, I don't like this sort of thing. . . . In fact I came to the house now determined to make another stand to Mrs. Perkins.

HIRAM

Are you going to tell her who you are?

LUCILLE

Oh, Barrett, why did n't you tell me?

SHERIDAN (*thoroughly annoyed at the failure of his plans*) Because I wanted you to like me for myself. Look here, Evans, you don't seem to be playing a very open game here yourself.

LUCILLE (*wide-eyed*)

Is your name Evans?

HIRAM

No.

SHERIDAN

I 'm going to talk to Mrs. Perkins and have it over with. (*Starts for the porch*)

HIRAM

One moment. Will you let me be your ambassador?

SHERIDAN (*rather liking the idea, but hesitating*)

Why . . . why, yes . . . that is, if you 'll put up a strong enough talk for me.

HIRAM (*significantly*)

I am to see your father next week.

SHERIDAN (*surprised*)

You are?

HIRAM

Yes, he is publishing some stuff of mine. I 'll try and fix it with him for you, and if my diplomacy here is successful — (*Interrupts himself to turn to Lucille*) Lucille, are you willing to take charge of this young man's name, even if it 's Tillottson and not Sheridan?

LUCILLE (*eagerly*)

Why, yes.

HIRAM

And to cherish him as fondly on several thousand a year as if he were a poor actor?

LUCILLE (*a little bit dazed*)

Why, yes, of course.

HIRAM

Then bless you, my children. (*Passes Lucille over to Sheridan*)

SHERIDAN

When will you speak to Mrs. Perkins?

HIRAM

In a few moments. In the meantime you two might take a walk around the Court House Square. Don't come back for half an hour.

LUCILLE

Very well, we won't. (*They start off happily for the gate; Lucille stops and comes back to Hiram*) Are we friends now? (*Extending her hand and smiling up into his face*)

HIRAM (*drawing her toward him*)

I hope so. (*For an instant he is tempted to tell her the truth of his identity; there is a little pause and then he says in his old inscrutable manner*) Run along now.

[*Lucille rejoins Sheridan at the gate.*

SHERIDAN

Evans, you 're a mystery, but you 're a brick.

[*The lovers go to the left down the street. Hiram goes up to the fence and leans against it, looking after them.*

HIRAM (*calling after them*)

Romeo and Juliet, I 'm trusting you to play fair and not take French leave.

SHERIDAN

On my honor.

HIRAM

As a Montague?

SHERIDAN (*shouting back*)

No, as a Tillottson.

HIRAM

That 's good enough!

[*He leans on the fence, contemplating them, when he is aroused by the voice of Eugene Merryfield in the near distance.*

EUGENE (*off*)

Mis' Perkins . . . Mis' Perkins . . . oh, Mis' Perkins!

[*Portia enters from the house and comes down the porch steps, followed by Preston. Eugene, hatless and breathless, comes running down the road.*

PORTIA

Is that you, Gene?

EUGENE (*bolting into the yard almost exhausted*)

Oh, Mis' Perkins!

PORTIA (*alarmed*)

What 's the matter? Is the office on fire?

EUGENE

No, but it might as well be.

PORTIA

What do you mean?

[*Hiram strolls down and listens.*

EUGENE

They 've smashed up the office.

PORTIA

Smashed the office?

EUGENE

Yes . . . they 've thrown down the forms . . . upset the case . . . pied all the type . . . and . . . and played hell with everything!

PORTIA (*grimly*)

Who did it?

EUGENE

Old Skinner and Miss Faxon was the ringleaders,

but there was more 'n twenty people helpin' . . . reg'lar mob.

PORTIA

Why did you let them in?

EUGENE

I did n't. I locked the door when I seen 'em comin', but they smashed the windows and came in that way.

PORTIA (*brokenly*)

My God!

PRESTON

What did they do it for?

EUGENE

Skinner's spite mostly, but it 's been breedin' fer two weeks. Of course now Skinner stands to lose and . . . (*With a look and gesture toward Hiram*) and *him* workin' at her desk in the office to-day jest brought it to a head.

HIRAM (*coolly*)

Oh, then the demonstration was in my honor.

EUGENE (*savagely*)

Well, mostly, I guess. (*Turning to Portia again*) They threw me out. I tried to find the constable, but I could n't, so I come to tell you.

LEWELLYN (*off to the left, shouting wildly*)

Eugene . . . ! Mis' Perkins . . . ! Oh, Eugene . . . ! (*He rushes down the street from the left, vaults the fence; murmurs of a crowd are heard coming after him*) Oh, they 're comin', they 're comin'!

PORTIA

Who?

EUGENE

What do you mean?

PRESTON

Who 's coming?

LEWELLYN (*struggling for breath*)

The folks . . . the crowd . . . the ones that broke into the office.

PORTIA

What are they coming here for?

[*Eugene goes up to the fence and looks off to the left; the mob surges on.*

EUGENE

Here they come hellityclip.

[*A crowd of excited men and women, all talking at once, murmuring and muttering vague threats, surges into the yard through the gate and over the fence. A fringe of small boys climb the fence for a better view of the sport. The men are in various stages of costume; some, having evidently left their evening smoke on the front porch to join the crowd, are in their shirt sleeves and hatless. Most of the women have caught up veils, fascinators, or light shawls and thrown them over their heads. As they catch sight of Portia with Preston, Lewellyn, and Eugene on one side and Hiram at the other side of the yard, they shout "Here they are!" "We've found them at home!" etc.*

SKINNER (*in the full exercise of his powers of leadership*) Come on, folks. Guess the lady of the house is at home, and this individual too.

[*He indicates Hiram, who is apparently not at all perturbed and has dropped down on the garden seat next the hedge.*

The noise of the party stops, and the young people

and Mrs. Wilcox come around the side of their house to find out the cause of the excitement.

IVY WILCOX

What 's goin' on over to Perkins?

PORTIA (*all her spirit up again*)

What do you mean by coming here like this?

CROWD

Listen to her! . . . Look at her airs!

SKINNER (*stepping out from the crowd*)

We 're goin' to call a halt to your goin's on, Mis' Perkins.

PRESTON

Skinner, you are invading private property.

SKINNER

Oh, another county heard from, neighbors; the democratic nominee seems to be hangin' 'round here too.

[*The crowd mutters its disapproval of such didos.*

PORTIA (*her wrath at white heat*)

You old thief! So you 've ruined my office? Well, you 'll pay for it, understand that.

SKINNER

I never laid a hand on it.

PRESTON

You 've incited these people to riot.

MISS FAXON (*aglow with virtuous indignation as she steps into the limelight and addresses Preston*) We ain't people, if you please, we 're a committee; and we 're organized to purify the morals of this here community.

CROWD (*in a moral frenzy*)

Down with vice in Gosport! . . . Down with immorality! . . . Purity forever! etc.

PRESTON (*to the crowd*)

You are exceeding your rights.

SKINNER (*his face wreathed in sarcastic smiles*)

Our business ain't with the democratic nominee, though we know he 's pretty solid with the "Clarion."

[*The crowd guffaws at this delicate bon mot.*

PORTIA

I want an explanation of this outrage.

[*Linc Watkins in his ulster, his throat bandaged in red flannel, elbows his way through the crowd to Portia.*

LINC (*in a very hoarse voice*)

What in Time is this here fracas about?

SKINNER (*in the oratorical manner that was acquired for the State House at Indianapolis*) Fer your benefit, Mr. Watkins and Mis' Perkins and any friends of hern that may be present, I will state on behalf of the citizens of Gosport that we hev given Mis' Perkins notice, by raidin' her printing office and by this here meetin', that she has got to stop her present course of conduct.

PORTIA

What do you mean?

MISS FAXON (*with an elocutionary tone and gesture that would do credit to Ivy Wilcox*)

We mean *him.* (*She points to Hiram with outstretched arm*)

LINC

You old devil! (*He starts for Skinner, but several men restrain him*)

PORTIA

Be quiet, Linc. (*To Skinner*) Do you mean that I am not permitted by this town to keep a servant?

SKINNER (*jeeringly*)

Servant? . . . *Servant?* He! he! . . . that 's good. Why, you never kept no servant till this here individual came along. If you wanted a hired girl, they was plenty of *wimmin* folks to be had. Ain't that so, neighbors?

[*The crowd assents eagerly.*

MISS FAXON

It 's perfectly scandalous!

SKINNER

No siree, Bob! That servant story don't go down. Besides, this man ain't no servant. He was jest a kind of a tramp when he came to live here.

PRESTON (*staggered*)

What?

SKINNER (*enjoying this phase of it particularly*)

The democratic nominee seems surprised. Yes, sir, a tramp. We 've got a witness to prove it. Come out here, Claud Whitcomb, and face her down. (*He digs Claud out of the crowd, where he has been hanging back*) Tell what you know about it, Claud.

CLAUD (*rather shamefaced at the part he is forced to play, yet feeling the thrill of being an important figure in the affair*) Oh, I ain't got nothin' to say agin Mis' Perkins personally. I jest know what I seen, that 's all.

CROWD

Out with it! . . . Tell what you know! . . . Tell your story! etc.

PORTIA

What is it, Claud?

CLAUD (*nervously fingering his cap and whipstock*)

Oh, not so awful much . . . only, 'bout two weeks ago, I sold you a load of wood fer kitchen use. Beech and maple, seasoned all winter, I know 'cause . . .

SKINNER (*impatiently*)

Never mind that.

CROWD

Go on! . . . Nobody cares about your wood.

CLAUD

Well, I was throwin' it in the back yard from the alley there (*indicates down the right*) beside the kitchen, when I seen this here feller (*indicates Hiram*) rise up from the back stoop and go round to the side stoop and walk right in.

CROWD

Don't that beat all? . . . Did you ever?

SKINNER (*rubbing his hands*)

And what then, Claud, what then?

CLAUD

I could see them talkin' through the window, till Mis' Perkins come and pulled down the window shades.

MISS FAXON

Disgustin', I call it!

CLAUD

Jest as I was through, I seen him with a candle in his hand, goin' past the upstairs window, on the side of the alley there. (*He indicates the other side of the house*)

MISS FAXON (*to a woman friend*)

And I nearly got her into our Sons and Daughters of Freedom.

CLAUD

When I went to git my money, Mis' Perkins turned pale as a ghost and her hand shook so she could hardly count out the money. The next I heard he was livin' here stiddy.

EUGENE

That 's a nice story!

CLAUD (*defending his veracity*)

It 's a true one.

SKINNER

Ask Mis' Perkins if it ain't.

LINC

It 's a damned lie!

PORTIA

It is perfectly true.

[*There is consternation among her friends and amazement among her enemies.*

SKINNER

Nice goin's on, eh, neighbors? (*They mutter their feelings*) We 'll give the man in the case a little regulatin' with tar and feathers and a ride on a rail, and then see if he is able to do housework.

[*The crowd begins to get savage and eager for its prey; it turns and glares at Hiram, who sits facing them on the bench in the attitude of an amused spectator.*

PORTIA (*terrified*)

No . . . no, you would n't do that?

SKINNER

Won't we, though!

HIRAM (*rising and coming toward them with an easy, contemptuous smile*) By all means, why should n't they? They are free-born Americans with a constitutional government and public schools. Therefore, when things are a little slow, they feel that they must burn or drown or kill someone, and, oddly enough, do it in the name of public morality. It is a feature of our national life that has made us world-famed.

PORTIA (*in terror for him*)
Don't!

HIRAM
I don't wish to stand in the way of these good citizens and their traditions. Their charming little plan will give pleasure to the many and pain to the few, and *the majority must rule.*

SKINNER (*realizing that Hiram's calm contempt is cooling off the crowd*) Listen to him, neighbors, tryin' to speechify.

CLAUD (*now in the spirit of the thing and not wishing to waste the evening*) Come on and give him his medicine.

PORTIA
Don't! For God's sake, don't do it!

PRESTON
You are all liable to arrest!

SKINNER
Oh, you go to hell!

[*The crowd is half crazed with excitement now and ready for anything. They press toward Hiram, who stands at the centre with his back to them and his hands in his pockets. Portia, as they lay hands*

on Hiram, pushes them back and puts her hand on his shoulder as she faces them.

PORTIA

Stop! This man is my *husband!*

CROWD

What!

PRESTON

Portia!

EUGENE and LINC

Mis' Perkins!

SKINNER

What 's that?

[*A dead silence follows, everyone is stunned, Portia's friends most of all.*

PRESTON (*horrified*)

Portia, you have n't *married* this man?

PORTIA

Yes . . . seventeen years ago.

SKINNER (*shaking with rage, points at Hiram*)

Is . . . is that Perkins?

PORTIA

Yes.

SKINNER (*beaten*)

Well, I 'm damned!

MISS FAXON (*pointing at Hiram*)

You don't mean that he is . . . is . . .

PORTIA (*evenly*)

He is Lucille's and Mary Jane's father. If you will come into the house I will show you the certificate.

MISS FAXON (*with head still high*)

No, I thank you, I make it a rule never to 'tend to other people's business.

HIRAM

Mrs. Perkins, I appreciate your heroic candor. The Gosport Society for Ethical Culture might have proven too much for me.

CLAUD (*to a friend*)

Listen how perlite he talks to her. I don't believe he 's her husband.

HIRAM (*turning to the crowd*)

You will please explain by what right you invaded Mrs. Perkins' office, destroyed her fixtures, and interfered with the conduct of her business.

[*Each one in the crowd looks at his or her next-door neighbor and begins a disclaimer. "I did n't break anything"; "Bill Tompkins started it"; "It 's Joel Skinner's fault," etc., are some of the remarks. All begin a quiet retreat.*

MISS FAXON (*as she goes out the gate*)

Thank goodness, I tried my best to keep 'em from violence.

CLAUD (*making for the road*)

I always liked Mis' Perkins.

SKINNER (*trying to rally the crowd*)

Why look here, he ain't proved he *is* Perkins yit. (*To Hiram*) Where you been keepin' yerself all this time if you *are* Perkins? And — and see here, do you know I hold yer wife's notes fer six hundred dollars?

[*The crowd stops, anticipating more excitement.*

HIRAM

We will talk of that after you defend the suit that will be brought against you to-morrow.

SKINNER

What suit?

HIRAM

Perkins versus Skinner, for damages.

SKINNER (*gulping*)

You don't—

HIRAM

No argument, please; we have plenty of witnesses.

[*At this the crowd takes fright and tries to get away.*

SKINNER (*beaten and realizing that he stands alone, turns and looks from Hiram to Portia in mute rage*)

Oh . . . you . . . you . . . Hell cat!

[*Hiram promptly knocks him down, and he falls into the arms of the friends who are nearest him.*

Star Skinner leaps over the hedge from the Wilcox yard and rushes to his father's assistance. The friends hustle Skinner away and the guests go back to the party.

Linc, Eugene, and Lewellyn go into the house with Portia, leaving Hiram and Preston alone in the yard facing each other. Preston makes a move to go.

HIRAM

Mr. Preston, in justice to Mrs. Perkins, I wish to say that this situation was forced on her, in a sense. I should like to make the *amende-honorable* so far as I may.

PRESTON (*sternly*)

It strikes me there is very little for you to say.

HIRAM

Nevertheless I shall ask your indulgence . . . not to make excuses for myself. I am an absolutely inexcusable person. You know Portia's domestic his-

tory. That 's enough. My arrival here three weeks ago was an absolute surprise to her. She pitied my semi-destitute condition. . . . Oh, a very impersonal pity . . . and she offered me shelter on condition that I act as a house-servant. I surprised both her and myself by accepting. I should not have done so. I was short-sighted. So was she. (*With earnest emphasis*) The point is that I have kept my place. Even my daughters do not know my identity. I have lived here in this house as a servant *only*. Do you believe me?

PRESTON (*regarding him searchingly*)

Ye . . . yes.

HIRAM

I meant to stay only a day or two. I delayed my departure because — (*With a look up at the room over the kitchen where Mary Jane is*) Well, I don't feel bound to give my reasons. (*Forcing himself away from this phase of the interview*) I meant to give Portia a chance to adjust her life as she wished. I understand the attachment that has naturally and very properly come to exist between you. . . . I will leave here at once . . . you can institute divorce proceedings in Portia's name. I have left the money to pay for the suit with Mary Jane.

[*Portia enters the porch with Linc, Lewellyn, and Eugene, who are shaking hands with her and leaving.*

PORTIA

Good night, boys.

THE THREE

Good night, Mis' Perkins. (*They go out the gate and down the road together*)

PRESTON

Has Portia agreed to this?

HIRAM

I have n't spoken of it to her.

[*Portia comes toward them. Hiram goes up the stage and out into the street, as if to take himself out of the way and also to watch for Lucille and Sheridan.*

PRESTON (*as Portia comes over to him*)

Portia, why did n't you tell me this thing?

PORTIA

At first I meant to. Then when the town talk started, I knew you would let it interfere with your fight. I wanted to see you as good as elected before I told you.

PRESTON (*with bitter regret*)

My nomination . . . my election . . . what was it all to be for? You know why I was striving to justify your faith in me.

PORTIA

Yes, I do . . . and don't think it has all been for nothing. My life here would have been terribly bitter if it had n't been for your caring, Rome.

PRESTON

And did n't you care, too?

PORTIA

Yes . . . and yet I can see how I mistook my heart hunger for something deeper. . . . I was misled by my admiration for you, too, and my desire for your success.

PRESTON

Don't think I forget all you 've done for me. My ambition would n't have carried me very far without

the backing of the "Clarion" . . . but, Portia, I always saw you at the end of everything I was striving for . . . I wanted to make you happy.

PORTIA

And so you can, Rome. Take up this larger life that is waiting for you and live it splendidly. Some day I 'll hear you speak in the State House, and can't you imagine what it will mean to me to know that my faith in you and my work helped you to your rightful place?

[*Her face glows with pride in him and honest affection. He looks into her eyes and in their frankness reads his future.*

PRESTON (*taking her hands*)

I 'll try to be big, Portia. I want to be big and fine. It 's the only way I can show you what you 've been to me. (*Both are moved; there is a pause; his voice comes brokenly*) I wish it could have been different. . . . Don't forget how I 've loved you . . . don't . . . don't . . . (*After a long look into her eyes he drops her hands and goes rapidly up the path and out the gate; there he comes upon Hiram; the two men stand for an instant facing each other in silence*) Take care of her . . . love her . . . make her happy . . . she 's earned it.

[*He goes out and down the road to the left.*

Portia, standing in the yard as Preston left her, turns and sees Hiram, his face turned to the road and his old hat pulled down as on that night three weeks ago when she turned him out. The lonely figure, with something of careless grace in it, is silhouetted against the moonlight, and her gate is closed between them. She goes up to the gate and opens it.

PORTIA

Come in, Hiram.

HIRAM (*coming to the gate, but keeping outside*)

It was fine of you to save my feelings before Preston, for at last I can feel.

PORTIA

I spoke for myself, not for you. Come in.

HIRAM

Three weeks ago you offered me a refuge and I accepted it. I am not asking now . . . and, Portia, I could n't accept it again.

PORTIA

It is I who am asking. Please come. (*He enters the gate, and in silence they walk to the porch steps; both are thinking deeply and speech is not easy; Portia seats herself on the steps and Hiram stands by the porch pillar*) Don't leave me, Hiram, I want you . . . I need you.

HIRAM

What are you saying?

PORTIA (*her eyes seeming to be searching the past*)

Hiram, we began our life together all wrong. We were too young to understand life or each other, and the narrowness and monotony of our lives in those early years warped us.

HIRAM

You are generous.

PORTIA

No, I remember that you were selfish, indifferent, and lazy; that you lacked feeling and affection; and that I was fretful, ignorant, and antagonistic. And I remember, too, that I was n't interested in you

after the children came. I can see that you were lonely, and I 've learned to know that feeling myself.

HIRAM (*huskily*)

Go on.

PORTIA

You were right when you said your absence had developed me. . . . I know that, and your experiences have developed you. We have both grown in these last ten years. I realized it all in a flash the moment those people attacked you to-night . . . when they laid hands on you . . .

HIRAM

Compassion . . . womanly pity.

PORTIA

It was more than that. I realized that you were my own, and flesh of my flesh . . . as the children are. . . . I knew that we were joined together, and that nothing you have done or that those wretches might do could really put us asunder.

HIRAM (*deeply moved*)

Portia!

PORTIA

And the children, Hiram.

HIRAM

The children were nothing to me until —

PORTIA

Until now. But I 've seen the father in you stir. I know that you love Girlie, and I 've seen that you fear for Lucille.

HIRAM (*intoxicated*)

Go on.

PORTIA (*looking up at him tenderly*)

It 's your awakening and mine, Hiram. It is n't all duty . . . it 's my happiness I 'm asking you for.

HIRAM (*haltingly, as if his power of expression, once so quick to respond to his thought, was now quite submerged in his emotion*) It all means so much to me, Portia, that I shall take you at your word. I feel the strength of the universe flowing into my brain and heart. I 'm in love with you and the children, with work, with the world, with myself, with God. Can you believe me, dear?

[*She holds out her hand to him; he takes it and sits beside her.*

PORTIA (*her face glowing*)

Yes, Hiram.

[*Mary Jane in her nightgown appears at the back bedroom window.*

MARY JANE (*calling*)

Mumsey!

PORTIA

Yes.

MARY JANE

Mumsey, can't I have a party too?

PORTIA

Yes, dear, to-morrow.

HIRAM (*calling up to her*)

And who do you think has been invited?

MARY JANE

Who?

HIRAM

Dippy Doldub.

[*Mary Jane leans out the window sill laughing and waving her hand down to them. Down the road in*

the moonlight come Sheridan and Lucille, absorbed in each other and unconscious of all the rest of the world. They enter the gate, and as it clicks, Hiram points them out to Portia and smilingly explains the situation as the curtain descends.

CURTAIN

MAY 1989 DATE DUE

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